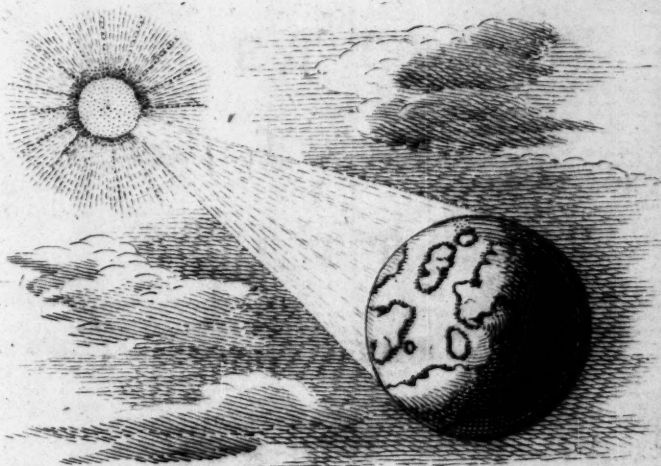


A
FREE INQUIRY
INTO THE
NATURE and ORIGIN
OF
E V I L.

In SIX LETTERS to —.

The THIRD EDITION, amended.



L O N D O N :

Printed for R. and J. DODSLEY, in Pall-Mall.
MDCCLVIII.

FREE INQUIRY
INTO THE
NATURAL ORIGIN



IN SIX VOLUMES:
THE HISTORY OF THE

BY
JOHN HENRY WOODWARD
F.R.S.E.

CONTENTS.

L E T T E R I.	
On EVIL in general.	Page I
L E T T E R II.	
On EVILS of Imperfection.	23
L E T T E R III.	
On NATURAL EVILS.	43
L E T T E R IV.	
On MORAL EVILS.	79
L E T T E R V.	
On POLITICAL EVILS.	125
L E T T E R VI.	
On RELIGIOUS EVILS.	155

CONTENTS

LETTER I

On Faith in general.

LETTER II

On Ideas of Impression.

LETTER III

On Natural Faculties.

LETTER IV

On Moral Faculties.

LETTER V

On Political Faculties.

LETTER VI

On Religious Faculties.

LETTER I.

On EVIL in general.

SIR,

HAVING enjoy'd the pleasure of many accidental conferences with you on metaphysical, moral, political, and religious subjects; on which you ever seem'd to converse with more sagacity, as well as more candor, than is usual on the like occasions; I imagin'd it might not be unentertaining either to you, or myself, to put together my sentiments on these important topics, and communicate them to you from time to time as the absence of business, or of more agree-

B

able

2 The N A T U R E and

able amusements may afford me opportunity. This I propose to do under the general title of an Inquiry into the Nature, and Origin of Evil; an Inquiry, which will comprehend them all, and which, I think, has never been attended to with that diligence it deserves, nor with that success, which might have been hoped for from that little that has been bestow'd upon it. The right understanding of this abstruse speculation, I look upon to be the only solid foundation, on which any rational system of Ethicks can be built; for it seems impossible, that men should ever arrive at any just ideas of their Creator, or his Attributes, any proper notions of their relation to him, or their duty to each other, without first settling in their minds some satisfactory solution of this important

ORIGIN of EVIL. 3

tant question, *Whence came Evil?* Whilst we find ourselves liable to innumerable miseries in this life; apprehensive of still greater in another, and can give no probable account of this our wretched situation, what sentiments must we entertain of the justice and benevolence of our Creator, who placed us in it, without our sollicitations, or consent? The works of the Creation sufficiently demonstrate his existence, their beauty, perfection, and magnificence his infinite power, and wisdom; but it is the Happiness only, which we enjoy, or hope for, which can convince us of his Goodness.

It is the solution therefore of this important question alone, that can ascertain the moral Characteristic of God, and

4 The NATURE and

upon that only must all human Virtue eternally depend.

If there's a Power above us,
(And that there is all Nature cries aloud
Thro' all her works) he must delight in
Virtue,

And that, which he delights in, must be
happy.

But shou'd this divine reasoning of the
philosopher be at last inconclusive; cou'd
we once entertain such blasphemous no-
tions of the Supreme Being, as that He
might not delight in Virtue, neither
adhere to it himself, nor reward it in
others; that He could make any part of
his creation miserable, or suffer them
to make themselves so without a just
cause, and a benevolent end; all moral
considerations must be vain, and useless;

we

ORIGIN of EVIL. 5

we can have no rule by which to direct our actions, nor, if we had, any kind of obligation to pursue it : nor in this case can any Revelation in the least assist us, the belief of all Revelation being in its own nature subsequent, not only to the belief of God's existence, but of his justice and veracity ; for if God can injure us, he may also deceive us ; and then there is an end of all distinctions between good and evil, truth and falsehood, and of all confidence in God or Man.

I mean not by this to insinuate the least possibility of a doubt concerning the Justice or Goodness of our Creator, but only to shew the importance of this Inquiry and the utility of it towards settling our notions of his Attributes,

6 The N A T U R E and

and the regulation of our own behaviour in conformity to them. I intend not by it to prove the benevolence of God but to reconcile the miseries we see and suffer, with that uncontrovertable benevolence: I design not to shew that God approves Virtue, but that the admission of moral Evil is not inconsistent with that undoubted approbation: nor wou'd I be understood to assert, that our obligation to be virtuous depends on this abstruse Speculation, but only that our right understanding it will remove all doubts concerning the nature of Virtue, and our obligation to pursue it, and fix them on the most firm, and immoveable Basis.

To find out therefore how Evil of any kind can be the production of infinite Goodness, joined with infinite Power, should

ORIGIN of EVIL. 7

should be the first step in all our religious inquiries; the examination into which wonderful paradox will lead us into many useful and sublime truths; and its perfect comprehension, was that possible for our narrow capacities, would, I doubt not, make as surprising discoveries in the Moral World, as mathematical and physical knowledge have in the Natural.

To clear up this difficulty, some ancient Philosophers have had recourse to the supposition of two first Causes, one Good, and the other Evil, perpetually counteracting each others designs. This system was afterwards adopted by the *Manichean* Heresy, and has since been defended by the ingenious *Mons. Bayle*: but as the supposition of two first Causes

8 The NATURE and

is even in itself a contradiction, and as the whole scheme has been demonstrated by the best metaphysical Writers to be as false as it is impious, all further arguments to disprove it would be needless.

Others have endeavoured to account for this by the introduction of a Golden Age, or Paradisaical State, in which all was innocence and happiness.

Pœna metusque aberant, nec verba men-
cia fixo

Ære legebantur, nec supplex turba time-
bant

Judicis ora sui; sed erant sine vindice
tuti.

When

ORIGIN of EVIL. 9

When Man yet new,
No rule but uncorrupted Reason knew,
And with a native bent did Good pur-
sue ;

Unforc'd by punishment, unaw'd by fear,
His words were simple, and his soul sin-
cere :

Needless was written law, when none op-
prest,

The law of Man was written in his
breast :

No suppliant crowds before the Judge
appear'd,

No court erected yet, nor cause was
heard,

But all was safe, for Conscience was their
Guard.

*Ver erat æternum, placidisque tepentibus
auris*

Mulcebant Zephyri natos sine semine flores ;

Mox

10 The N A T U R E and

*Mox etiam fruges tellus inarata ferebat,
Nec renovatus ager gravidis canebat aristis,
Flumina jam lactis, jam flumina nectaris
 ibant,
Flavaque de viridi stillabant ilice mella.*

The flow'rs unsown in fields and meadows reign'd,

And Western Winds immortal Spring maintain'd.

In following years the bearded corn ensu'd
From Earth unask'd, nor was that Earth
 renew'd.

From veins of valleys milk and nectar
 broke,

And honey sweated from the pores of
 Oak.

Amusing dreams! as absurd in philosophy,
as in poetry delightful! For tho'

it

ORIGIN of EVIL. 11

it is probable, from the most ancient histories, as well as from analogy drawn from the rest of Nature's productions, that the World might be more happy and more innocent in its Infancy, than in more advanced Ages; yet that it cou'd ever be totally free from Vice and Misery, may easily, I think, be proved impossible, both from the nature of this terrestrial Glob, and the nature of its Inhabitants. So that these inchanting Scenes can in fact never have existed: but, if they had, the short duration of this perfection is equally inconsistent with infinite Power, joined to infinite Wisdom and Goodness, as any original imperfection whatever. Fables then of this kind can never in the least account for the Origin of Evil: they are all but mean expedients, which will never be able to
take

12 The NATURE and

take away the difficulty, and can at most but obscure it, by shifting it a little backwards into a less clear light; like that *Indian* philosophy, accounting for the support of the World, which informs us, that it is sustained by a vast Elephant, that Elephant by a Tortoise, and then prudently drops any further inquiry.

The Divines and Moralists of later Ages seem perfectly satisfied that they have loosed this Gordian knot, by imputing the source of all Evil to the abuse of Free-will in Created Beings. God, they say, never designed any such thing shou'd exist as Evil, moral or natural; but that giving to some Beings, for good and wise purposes, a power of Free-agency, they perverted this power to
bad

ORIGIN of EVIL. 13

bad ends, contrary to his intentions and commands; and thus their accidental wickedness produced consequential Misery. But to suppose in this manner, that God intended all things to be good and happy, and at the same time gave being to creatures able and willing to obstruct his benevolent designs, is a notion so inconsistent with his wisdom, goodness, omniscience, and omnipotence, that it seems equally unphilosophical, and more evidently absurd, than the other. They have been led into this error by ridiculously judging of the dispensation of a Creator to his Creatures, by the same rules which they apply to the dealings of Men towards each other; between which there is not the least proportion or similitude. A Man who endeavours, to the utmost of his power, to make others virtuous

14 The NATURE and

tuous and happy, however unsuccessful, is sufficiently justified; but in a Being omnipotent and omniscient, the Cause of all causes, the Origin of all thought, will, and action; who sees all things past, present, and to come, in one instantaneous view, the case is widely different; his active and permissive will must be exactly the same; and, in regard to him, all consequential and future Evils, thro' every moment of time, are actually present.

Since therefore none of these pretended solutions can, I am certain, give such satisfaction to your comprehensive understanding, let us now try to find out one more rational, and more consistent with the analogy of every thing around us.

That

ORIGIN of EVIL. 15

That there is a Supreme Being infinitely powerful, wise, and benevolent, the great Creator and Preserver of all things, is a truth so clearly demonstrated, that it shall be here taken for granted. That there is also in the universal system of things, the works of his almighty hand, much misery and wickedness, that is, much natural and moral Evil, is another truth, of which every hour's fatal experience cannot fail to convince us. How these two undoubted, yet seeming contradictory truths can be reconciled, that is, how Evils of any sort could have a place in the works of an omnipotent and good Being, is very difficult to account for. If we assert that he could not prevent them, we destroy his power; if that he would not,

we

216 The NATURE and

we arraign his goodness; and therefore his power and goodness cannot both be infinite.

But however conclusive this argument may seem, there is somewhere or other an error in it; and this error I take to arise from our wrong notions of omnipotence. Omnipotence cannot work contradictions, it can only effect all possible things. But so little are we acquainted with the whole system of Nature, that we know not what are possible, and what are not: but if we may judge from that constant mixture of pain with pleasure, and of inconvenience with advantage, which we must observe in every thing around us, we have reason to conclude, that to endue created Beings with perfection, that is, to produce Good exclusive of Evil,

ORIGIN of EVIL. 17

Evil, is one of those impossibilities which even infinite Power cannot accomplish.

The true solution then of this incomprehensible paradox must be this, that all Evils owe their existence solely to the necessity of their own natures, by which I mean they could not possibly have been prevented, without the loss of some superior Good, or the permission of some greater Evil than themselves; or that many Evils will unavoidably insinuate themselves by the natural relations and circumstances of things into the most perfect system of Created Beings, even in opposition to the will of an almighty Creator, by reason they cannot be excluded without working contradictions; which not being proper objects of power, it is no diminution of omnipotence to affirm that it cannot effect them.

18 The N A T U R E and

And here it will be proper to make a previous apology for an expression, which will frequently occur in the following pages, which is, that God cannot do such and such things: by which is always to be understood not any retrenchment of the divine omnipotence, but only that such things are in their own natures impracticable, and impossible to be performed.

That the Almighty should be thus limited, and circumscribed by the nature of things, of which he himself is the Author, may to some seem not very intelligible: but surely it is not at all difficult to conceive, that in every possible method of ordering, disposing, and framing the universal system of things, such numberless inconveniences might necessarily arise, that all that infinite
power

ORIGIN of EVIL. 19

Power and Wisdom could do, was to make choice of that method, which was attended with the least and fewest; and this not proceeding from any defect of power in the Creator, but from that imperfection which is inherent in the nature of all created things.

This necessity, I imagine, is what the Ancients meant by Fate, to which they fancied that *Jupiter*, and all the Gods, were obliged to submit, and which was to be controuled by no power whatever. The *Stoicks* seem to have had some dark and unintelligible notions of this kind, which they neither understood themselves, nor knew how to explain to others; that the untractableness of Matter was the cause of Evil; that God would have made all things perfect, but that there was in Matter an evil bias repugnant to

20 The N A T U R E and

his benevolence, which drew another way, whence arose all manner of Evils. Of the like kind is a Maxim of the same Philosophers, That Pain is no Evil; which, if asserted with regard to the individuals who suffer it, is downright nonsense; but if considered as it affects the universal System, is an undoubted truth, and means only that there is no more pain in it than what is necessary to the production of happiness. How many soever of these Evils then force themselves into the Creation, so long as the Good preponderates, it is a work well worthy of infinite Wisdom and Benevolence; and, notwithstanding the imperfections of its parts, the whole is most undoubtedly perfect.

Hence then we may plainly see, that much Evil may exist, not at all inconsistent

ORIGIN of EVIL. 21

sistent with the power and goodness of God : and the further we pursue this clue, the more we shall at every step discern new lights break out, which will discover clearly numberless examples, where the infinite power and goodness of God is fairly reconcileable with the misery and wickedness of his Creatures, from the impossibility of preventing them ; and if, in the very small part of the universal System that lies within the reach of our imperfect capacities, many instances of this kind appear, in which they are visibly consistent, we ought with the utmost assurance to conclude, what is undoubtedly true, that they are really so in all, tho' we are not able to comprehend them. This is the kind of Faith most worthy of the human understanding, and most meritorious in the sight of God, as it is the offspring of Reason, as

22 The N A T U R E, &c.

well as the Parent of all Virtue and Resignation to the just, but unscrutable, dispensations of Providence.

But, in order more clearly to explain this abstruse speculation, it will be necessary to divide Evils into their different Species, and bestow on each a separate consideration. This I shall do under the following heads: Evils of Imperfection, Natural Evils, and Religious Evils; which, I think, will comprehend most of those to which human Nature is unhappily liable. And now, Sir, lest I should add one more Evil to this melancholy Catalogue, which is that of a long and tedious Epistle, I shall reserve the examination into each of these particulars for the subject of a future Letter; and conclude this by assuring you, that I am,

S I R, &c.

LETTER II.

ON

EVILS of Imperfection.

C 4

LETTER II.

ON

THE ARTS OF IMPERFECTION.

C 4

LETTER II.

On Evils of Imperfection.

SIR,

IN pursuance of the plan proposed in my last, I shall now proceed to examine into the Nature of each particular kind of Evil, and in the first place of those therein denominated Evils of Imperfection; which are in truth no Evils at all, but rather the absence of some comparative Good; and therefore I shall not have occasion to detain you long on this part of my subject.

No

26 The NATURE and

No system can possibly be formed, even in imagination, without a subordination of parts. Every animal body must have different members, subservient to each other; every picture must be composed of various colours, and of light and shade; all harmony must be formed of trebles, tenors, and basses; every beautiful and useful edifice must consist of higher and lower, more and less magnificent apartments. This is in the very essence of all created things, and therefore cannot be prevented by any means whatever, unless by not creating them at all: for which reason, in the formation of the Universe, God was obliged, in order to carry on that just subordination so necessary to the very existence of the whole, to create Beings of different ranks; and to bestow on various species of animals, and also on the individuals of the same

ORIGIN of EVIL. 27

same species, various degrees of understanding, strength, beauty, and perfection; to the comparative want of which advantages we give the names of folly, weakness, deformity, and imperfection, and very unjustly repute them Evils: whereas in truth they are blessings as far as they extend, tho' of an inferior degree. They are no more actual Evils, than a small estate is a real misfortune, because many may be possessed of greater.

Whatever we enjoy, is purely a free gift from our Creator; but that we enjoy no more, can never sure be deemed an injury, or a just reason to question his infinite benevolence. All our happiness is owing to his goodness; but that it is no greater, is owing only to ourselves, that is, to our not having any inherent right to any happiness, or even to any
existence.

28 The N A T U R E and

existence at all. This is no more to be imputed to God, than the wants of a beggar to the person who has relieved him : that he had something, was owing to his Benefactor ; but that he had no more, only to his own original Poverty.

They who look upon the privation of all the good they see others enjoy, or think possible for infinite power to bestow, as positive Evil, understand not that the Universe is a system whose very essence consists in subordination ; a scale of Beings descending by insensible degrees from infinite perfection to absolute nothing ; in which, tho' we may justly expect to find perfection in the whole, could we possibly comprehend it ; yet would it be the highest absurdity to hope for it in all its parts, because the beauty and happiness of the whole depend altogether

ORIGIN of EVIL. 29

gether on the just inferiority of its parts, that is, on the comparative imperfections of the several Beings of which it is composed.

It would have been no more an instance of God's wisdom to have created no Beings but of the highest and most perfect order, than it would be of a painter's art, to cover his whole piece with one single colour the most beautiful he could compose. Had he confined himself to such, nothing could have existed but demi-gods, or archangels, and then all inferior orders must have been void and uninhabited: but as it is surely more agreeable to infinite benevolence, that all these should be filled up with Beings capable of enjoying happiness themselves, and contributing to that of others, they must necessarily be filled with inferior

o The NATURE and

rior Beings, that is, with such as are less perfect, but from whose existence, notwithstanding that less perfection, more felicity upon the whole accrues to the Universe, than if no such had been created. It is moreover highly probable, that there is such a connection between all ranks and orders by subordinate degrees, that they mutually support each other's existence, and every one in its place is absolutely necessary towards sustaining the whole vast and magnificent fabrick.

You see, therefore, that it is utterly impracticable, even for infinite power, to exclude from Creation this necessary inferiority of some Beings in comparison with others. All that it can do is to make each as happy as their respective situations will permit: and this it has

ORIGIN of EVIL. 31

done in so extraordinary a manner, as to leave the benevolence of our great Creator not to be doubted of ; for tho' he cannot make all superior, or even equal, yet in the dispensations of his blessings his wisdom and goodness both are well worthy the highest admiration ; for, amongst all the wide distinctions which he was obliged to make in the dignity and perfections of his Creatures, he has made much less in their happiness than is usually imagined, or indeed can be believed from outward appearances. He has given many advantages to Brutes, which Man cannot attain to with all his superiority, and many probably to Man which are denied to Angels ; amongst which his ignorance is perhaps none of the least. With regard to him, tho' it was necessary to the great purposes of human life to bestow riches, understanding,

32 The NATURE and

ing, and health, on individuals in very partial proportions ; yet has the Almighty so contrived the nature of things, that happiness is distributed with a more equal hand. His goodness, we may observe, is always striving with these our necessary imperfections, setting bounds to the inconveniences it cannot totally prevent, by balancing the wants, and repaying the sufferings of all by some kind of equivalent naturally resulting from their particular situations and circumstances. Thus, for example, poverty, or the want of riches, is generally compensated by having more hopes, and fewer fears, by a greater share of health, and a more exquisite relish of the smallest enjoyments, than those who possess them are usually blessed with. The want of taste and genius, with all the pleasures that arise from them, are commonly

ORIGIN of EVIL. 33

recompenced by a more useful kind of common sense, together with a wonderful delight, as well as success, in the busy pursuits of a scrambling World. The sufferings of the Sick art greatly relieved by many trifling gratifications imperceptible to others, and sometimes almost repaid by the inconceivable transports occasioned by the return of health and vigour. Folly cannot be very grievous, because imperceptible; and I doubt not but there is some truth in that rant of a mad Poet, that there is a pleasure in being mad, which none but Madmen know. Ignorance, or the want of knowledge and literature, the appointed lot of all born to poverty, and the drudgeries of life, is the only opiate capable of infusing that insensibility which can enable them to endure the miseries of the one, and the fatigues of the other. It is a

D

cor.

34 The NATURE and

cordial administered by the gracious hand of Providence ; of which they ought never to be deprived by an ill-judged and improper Education. It is the basis of all subordination, the support of society, and the privilege of individuals : and I have ever thought it a most remarkable instance of the Divine Wisdom, that whereas in all animals, whose individuals rise little above the rest of their species, knowledge is instinctive ; in Man, whose individuals are so widely different, it is acquired by Education ; by which means the Prince and the Labourer, the Philosopher and the Peasant, are in some measure fitted for their respective situations. The same parental care extends to every part of the animal creation. Brutes are exempted from numberless anxieties, by that happy want of reflection on past, and apprehension of future

ORIGIN of EVIL. 35

sufferings, which are annexed to their inferiority. Those amongst them who devour others, are taught by Nature to dispatch them as easily as possible; and Man, the most merciless devourer of all, is induced, by his own advantage, to feast those designed for his sustenance, the more luxuriously to feast upon them himself. This misery, by all possible methods, is diminished or repaid; and Happiness, like fluids, is ever tending towards an Equilibrium.

But was it ever so unequally divided, our pretence for complaint could be of this only, that we are not so high in the scale of existence as our ignorant ambition may desire: a pretence which must eternally subsist; because, were we ever so much higher, there would be still room for infinite power to exalt us; and

36 The N A T U R E and

since no link in the chain can be broke, the same reason for disquiet must remain to those who succeed to that chasm, which must be occasioned by our preferment. A Man can have no reason to repine, that he is not an Angel; nor a Horse, that he is not a Man; much less, that in their several stations they possess not the faculties of another; for this would be an insufferable misfortune. And doubtless it would be as inconvenient for a Man to be endued with the knowledge of an Angel, as for a Horse to have the reason of a Man; but, as they are now formed by the consummate wisdom of their Creator, each enjoys pleasures peculiar to his situation: and tho' the happiness of one may perhaps consist in divine Contemplation, of another in the acquisition of wealth and power, and that of a third in wandering amidst limpid streams,
and

ORIGIN of EVIL. 37

and luxuriant pastures ; yet the meanest of these enjoyments give no interruption to the most sublime, but altogether undoubtedly increase the aggregate sum of felicity bestowed upon the universe. Greatly indeed must that be lessened, were there no Beings but of the highest orders. Did there not, for instance, exist on this terrestrial Globe any sensitive creatures inferior to Man, how great a quantity of happiness must have been lost, which is now enjoy'd by millions, who at present inhabit every part of its surface, in fields and Gardens, in extended deserts, impenetrable woods, and immense oceans ; by monarchies of Bees, republics of Ants, and innumerable families of insects dwelling on every leaf and flower, who are all possessed of as great a share of pleasure, and a greater of innocence, than their arrogant Sovereign, and at the same time

38 The NATURE and

not a little contribute to his convenience
and happiness ?

Has God, thou Fool, work'd solely for
thy good !

Thy joy, thy pastime, thy attire, thy food !

Who for thy table feeds the wanton

Fawn,

For him as kindly spreads the flow'ry

lawn.

Is it for thee the Lark ascends and sings ?

Joy tunes his Voice, joy elevates his
wings.

Is it for thee the Linnet pours his throat ?

Loves of his own, and raptures, swell

the note.

The bounding Steed you pompously

bestride,

Shares with his Lord the pleasure and the

pride.

Is thine alone the seed that strews the

plain ?

The birds of Heav'n shall vindicate their

grain.

Thine

ORIGIN of EVIL 39

Thine the full harvest of the Golden
Year?
Part pays, and justly, the deserving
Steer.

POPE.

Thus the Universe resembles a large
and well-regulated Family, in which all
the officers and servants, and even the
domestic animals, are subservient to each
other in a proper subordination: each
enjoys the privileges and perquisites pe-
culiar to his place, and at the same time
contributes by that just subordination to
the magnificence and happiness of the
whole.

It is evident, therefore, that these
Evils of Imperfection, proceeding from
the necessary inferiority of some Beings
in comparison of others, can in no sense

40 The NATURE and

be called any Evils at all: but, if they could, it is as evident from thence, that there are many which even infinite power cannot prevent; it being sufficiently demonstrable, that to produce a system of created Beings, all supreme in happiness and dignity, a government composed of all Kings, an army of all Generals, or a universe of all Gods, must be impracticable for Omnipotence itself.

We have here then made a large stride towards our intended Goal, having at once acquitted the Divine Goodness, and freed Mankind from a numerous train of imaginary Evils, by most clearly shewing them to be no Evils at all; and yet under this head are really comprehended all the Evils we perpetually complain of, except actual pain:
the

ORIGIN of EVIL. 41

the nature of which, and how it came to have a place in the works of an omnipotent and good Being, shall be considered in the next Letter from,

S I R, &c.

L E T-

ORIGIN of EVIL. 41

the nature of which, and how it came to
have a place in the works of an omni-
potent and good Being, shall be con-
sidered in the next Letter from,

21 R, Sec.

L. E. T.

LETTER III.

ON

NATURAL EVILS.

LETTER III.

ON

NATURAL EVILS.

LETTER III.

On Natural EVILS.

SIR,

I Shall now lay before you my free sentiments concerning the Origin of Natural Evils, by which I understand the sufferings of sensitive Beings only; for tempests, inundations and earthquakes, with all the disorders of the material World, are no farther Evils than as they affect the sensitive: so that under this head can be only comprehended pains of body, and inquietudes of mind. That these are real Evils, I readily acknowledge; and if any one is philosopher enough

46 The N A T U R E and

enough to doubt of it, I shall only beg leave to refer him to a severe fit of sickness, or a tedious law-suit, for farther satisfaction.

The production of Happiness seems to be the only motive that could induce infinite Goodness to exert infinite power to create all things: for, to say truth, **Happiness is the only thing of real value in existence; neither riches, nor power, nor wisdom, nor learning, nor strength, nor beauty, nor virtue, nor religion, nor even life itself, being of any importance but as they contribute to its production. All these are in themselves neither Good nor Evil; Happiness alone is their great end, and they desirable only as they tend to promote it. Most astonishing therefore it must appear to every one who looks**

ORIGIN of EVIL. 47

looks round him, to observe all creatures bless'd with life and sensation, that is, all creatures made capable of Happiness, at the same time by their own natures condemned to innumerable and unavoidable miseries. Whence can it proceed, that Providence should thus seem to counteract his own benevolent intentions? To what strange and invisible cause are all these numerous and invincible Evils indebted for their Existence? If God is a good and benevolent Being, what end could he propose from creation, but the propagation of Happiness? and if Happiness is the end of all existence, why are not all creatures that do exist happy?

The true solution of this important question, so long and so vainly searched for by the philosophers of all ages and
all

48 The N A T U R E and

all countries, I take to be at last no more than this, That these real Evils proceed from the same source as those imaginary ones of Imperfection before treated of, namely, from that subordination, without which no created system can subsist; all subordination implying imperfection, all Imperfection Evil, and all Evil some kind of inconvenience or suffering; so that there must be particular inconveniences and sufferings annexed to every particular rank of created Beings by the circumstances of things, and their modes of existence. Most of those to which we ourselves are liable may be easily shewn to be of this kind, the effects only of human nature, and the station Man occupies in the universe: and therefore their Origin is plainly deducible from necessity; that is, they could not have been prevented without

ORIGIN of EVIL. 49

without the loss of greater good, or the admission of greater Evils than themselves; or by not creating any such creatures as Men at all. And tho' this, upon a general view of things, does not so forcibly strike us; yet, on a more minute inspection into every grievance attendant on human nature, it will most evidently appear. Most of these, I think, may be comprehended under the following heads: poverty, labour, inquietudes of mind, pains of body, and death; from none of which we may venture to affirm Man could ever have been exempted, so long as he continued to be Man. God indeed might have made us quite other creatures, and placed us in a world quite otherwise constituted; but then we had been no longer Men; and whatever Beings had occupied our stations in the universal System,

E. J. W.

they

50 **The NATURE** and
they must have been liable to the same
inconveniences.

Poverty, for example, is what all could not possibly have been exempted from, not only by reason of the fluctuating nature of human possessions, but because the world could not subsist without it; for had all been rich, none could have submitted to the commands of another, or the necessary drudgeries of life; thence all governments must have been dissolved, arts neglected, and lands uncultivated, and so an universal penury have over-whelmed all, instead of now and then pinching a few. Hence, by the by, appears the great excellence of Charity, by which Men are enabled by a particular distribution of the blessings and enjoyments of life, on proper occasions, to prevent that poverty which by a
general

ORIGIN of EVIL. 51

general one Omnipotence itself could never have prevented: so that, by enforcing this duty, God as it were demands our assistance to promote universal happiness, and to shut out Misery at every door, where it strives to intrude itself.

Labour indeed God might easily have excused us from, since at his command the Earth would readily have poured forth all her treasures without our inconsiderable assistance: but if the severest Labour cannot sufficiently subdue the malignity of human nature, what plots and machinations, what wars, rapine, and devastation, what profligacy, and licentiousness, must have been the consequences of universal idleness! So that Labour ought only to be looked upon as a task kindly imposed upon us by our in-

52 The N A T U R E and

dulgent Creator, necessary to preserve our health, our safety, and our innocence.

Inquietudes of mind cannot be prevented without first eradicating all our inclinations and passions, the winds and tides that preserve the great Ocean of human life from perpetual stagnation. So long as Men have pursuits, they must meet with disappointments ; and whilst they have disappointments, they must be disquieted ; whilst they are injured, they must be enflamed with anger ; and whilst they see cruelties, they must be melted with pity ; whilst they perceive danger, they must be sensible of fear ; and whilst they behold beauty, they must be enslaved by Love : nor can they be exempted from the various anxieties attendant on these various and turbulent passions.

ORIGIN of EVIL. 53

passions. Yet without them we should be undoubtedly less happy and less safe ; for without anger we should not defend ourselves, and without pity we should not assist others ; without fear we should not preserve our lives, and without love they would not be worth preserving.

Pains of body are perhaps but the necessary consequences of the union of material and spiritual essences ; for matter being by nature divisible, when endued with sensibility, must probably be affected by pains and pleasures by its different modifications : wherefore, to have been freed from our sufferings, we must have been deprived of all our sensual enjoyments ; a composition by which few surely would be gainers. Besides, the pains of our bodies are necessary to make us continually mindful of their preservation ; for what

54 The NATURE and

numberless lives would be lost by neglect in every trifling pursuit, or flung away in ill humour, was the piercing of a sword no more painful than the tickling of a feather ?

Death, the last and most dreadful of all Evils, is so far from being one, that it is the infallible cure for all others.

To die is landing on some silent shore,
Where billows never beat, nor tempests
 roar.

Ere well we feel the friendly stroke, 'tis
o'er. GARTH.

For, abstracted from the sickness and sufferings usually attending it, it is no more than the expiration of that term of life, God was pleased to bestow on us, without any claim or merit on our part. But was it an Evil ever so great, it could

could not be remedied but by one much greater, which is by living for ever; by which means our wickedness, unrestrained by the prospect of a future state, would grow so insupportable, our sufferings so intolerable by perseverance, and our pleasures so tiresome by repetition, that no Being in the Universe could be so completely miserable as a species of immortal Men. We have no reason therefore to look upon death as an Evil, or to fear it as a punishment, even without any supposition of a future life: but if we consider it as a passage to a more perfect state, or a remove only in an eternal succession of still improving states (for which we have the strongest reasons) it will then appear a new favour from the divine munificence; and a man must be as absurd to repine at dying, as a traveller would be, who proposed to himself

56 The N A T U R E and

a delightful tour thro' various unknown countries, to lament that he cannot take up his residence at the first dirty Inn which he baits at on the road. The instability of human life, or the hasty changes of its successive periods, of which we so frequently complain, are no more than the necessary progress of it to this necessary conclusion; and are so far from being Evils deserving these complaints, that they are the source of our greatest pleasures, as they are the source of all novelty, from which our greatest pleasures are ever derived. The continual succession of Seasons in the human life, by daily presenting to us new scenes, render it agreeable, and, like those of the year, afford us delights by their change, which the choicest of them could not give us by their continuance. In the Spring of Life, the gilding of the sunshine,

ORIGIN of EVIL. 57

shine, the verdure of the fields, and the variegated paintings of the Sky, are so exquisite in the Eyes of Infants at their first looking abroad into a new World, as nothing perhaps afterwards can equal. The heat and vigour of the succeeding Summer of Youth ripens for us new pleasures, the blooming maid, the nightly revel, and the jovial chace : the serene Autumn of compleat Manhood feasts us with the golden harvests of our worldly pursuits : nor is the hoary Winter of old age destitute of its peculiar comforts and enjoyments, of which the recollection and relation of those past are perhaps none of the least ; and at last Death opens to us a new prospect, from whence we shall probably look back upon the diversions and occupations of this world with the same contempt we do now on our Tops and Hobby-horses, and with
the

58 The N A T U R E and

the same surprise, that they could ever
so much entertain or engage us.

Thus we see all these Evils could never have been prevented even by infinite Power, without the introduction of greater, or the loss of superior good, they being but the necessary consequences of human Nature; from which it can no more be divested, than matter from extension, or heat from motion, which proceed from the very modes of their existence.

If it be objected, that, after all that has been said, there are innumerable miseries entailed upon all things that have life, and particularly on Man; many diseases of the body, and afflictions of mind, in which Nature seems to play the Tyrant, ingenious in contriving torments for her children; that we cannot
avoid

avoid seeing every moment with horror numbers of our fellow-creatures condemned to tedious and intolerable miseries, some expiring on racks, others roasting in flames, some starving in dungeons, others raving in mad houses; some broiling in fevers, others groaning whole months under the exquisite tortures of gout and stone: If it be said further, that some men being exempted from many calamities with which others are afflicted, proves plainly that all might have been exempted from all; the charge can by no means be disputed, nor can it be alledged that infinite Power could not have prevented most of these dreadful calamities. From hence therefore I am persuaded, that there is something in the abstract nature of pain conducive to pleasure; that the sufferings of individuals are absolutely necessary to universal hap-

60 The N A T U R E and

happiness ; and that, from connections to us inconceivable, it was impracticable for Omnipotence to produce the one, without at the same time permitting the other. Their constant and uniform concomitancy thro' every part of Nature with which we are acquainted, very much corroborates this conjecture, in which scarce one instance, I believe, can be produced of the acquisition of pleasure or convenience by any creatures, which is not purchased by the previous or consequential sufferings of themselves or others ; pointing out, as it were, that a certain allay of pain must be cast into the universal mass of created Happiness, and inflicted somewhere for the benefit of the whole. Over what mountains of slain is every mighty Empire rolled up to the summit of Prosperity and Luxury, and what new scenes of desolation attend its fall ?

ORIGIN of EVIL. 61

fall? To what infinite toil of Men, and other animals, is every flourishing City indebted for all the conveniences and enjoyments of Life, and what vice and misery do those very enjoyments introduce? The pleasures peculiar to the continuing our species are severely paid for by pains and perils in one Sex, and by cares and anxieties in both. Those annexed to the preservation of ourselves are both preceded and followed by numberless sufferings; preceded by the massacres and tortures of various animals preparatory to a feast, and followed by as many diseases lying in wait in every dish to pour forth vengeance on their destroyers. Our riches and honours are acquired by laborious or perilous occupations, and our sports are pursued with scarce less fatigue or danger, and usually attended with distresses and destruction of

62 The NATURE and

of innocent animals. This universal connection of pain with pleasure seems, I think, strongly to intimate, that pain abstractedly considered must have its uses ; and since we may be assured, that it is never admitted but with the reluctance of the supreme Author, those uses must be of the highest importance, tho' we have no faculties to conceive them.

The human mind can comprehend but a very small part of the great and astonishing whole : for any thing we know, the sufferings (and perhaps the crimes producing those sufferings) of the Inhabitants of this terrestrial Globe may some way or other affect those of the most distant planet, and the whole animal world may be connected by some principle as general as that of attraction in the corporeal, and so the miseries of particular

ORIGIN of EVIL. 63

cular Beings be some way necessary to the happiness of the whole. How these things operate, is indeed to us quite inconceivable; but that they do operate in some such extensive Manner is far, I think, from improbable.

All Ages and Nations seem to have had confused notions of the merits of sufferings abstracted from their tendency to any visible good, and have paid the highest honours to those who have voluntarily endured them, as to their common Benefactors. Many in Christian Countries have formerly been fainted for long fasting, for whipping or tormenting themselves, for sitting whole years in uneasy postures, or exposing themselves to the inclemency of the weather on the tops of pillars. Many at this day in the East are almost deified for loading themselves

64 The N A T U R E and
selves with heavy chains, bending under burthens, or confining themselves in chairs stuck round with pointed nails. Now, if these notions are not totally devoid of all reason and common sense, (and few, I believe, are so which become universal) they can be founded on no other principle than this, of the necessity of pain to produce happiness, which seems another weighty instance of the probability of this ancient and universal opinion, tho' the reasons for it are forgot or unknown, and the practices derived from it big with the most absurd and ridiculous superstitions.

One cause, I think, from which many of our severest sufferings may be derived, may be discovered by analogical reasoning, that is, by assimilating those things which are not objects of our understandings,

ORIGIN of EVIL. 65

ings, to others which lye within their reach. Man is one link of that vast Chain, descending by insensible degrees from infinite perfection to absolute nothing. As there are many thousands below him, so must there be many more above him. If we look downwards, we see innumerable species of inferior Beings, whose happiness and lives are dependent on his will; we see him cloathed by their spoils, and fed by their miseries and destruction, enslaving some, tormenting others, and murdering millions for his luxury or diversion; is it not therefore analogous and highly probable, that the happiness and life of Man should be equally dependent on the wills of his superiors? As we receive great part of our pleasures, and even subsistence, from the sufferings and deaths of lower animals, may not these superior Beings

F

do

66 The N A T U R E and

do the same from ours, and that by ways as far above the reach of the most exalted human understandings, as the means by which we receive our benefits are above the capacities of the meanest creatures destined for our service? The fundamental Error in all our reasonings on this subject, is that of placing ourselves wrong in that presumptuous climax of Beast, Man, and God; from whence, as we suppose falsely, that there is nothing above us except the Supreme Being, we foolishly conclude that all the Evils we labour under must be derived immediately from his omnipotent hand: whereas there may be numberless intermediate Beings, who have power to deceive, torment, or destroy us, for the ends only of their own pleasure or utility, who may be vested with the same privileges over their inferiors, and as much bene-

ORIGIN of EVIL. 67

benefited by the use of them, as ourselves. In what manner these benefits accrue to them, it is impossible for us to conceive; but that impossibility lessens not the probability of this conjecture, which by Analogy is so strongly confirmed.

Should you, Sir, have been lately employed in reading some of those sublime Authors, who, from pride and ignorance, delight to puff up the dignity of Human Nature, the notions here advanced may appear to you absurd and incredible, because inconsistent with that imaginary dignity; and you may object, that it is impossible that God should suffer innocence to be thus afflicted, and reason thus deceived; that tho' he may permit animals made solely for the use of Man to be thus abused for his conve-

68 The N A T U R E and

nience or recreation ; yet that Man himself, the sole possessor of reason, the Lord of this terrestrial globe, his own ambassador, vicegerent, and similitude, should be thus dependent on the will of others, must be utterly inconsistent with the divine Wisdom and Justice. But pray, Sir, what does all this prove, but the importance of a Man to himself? Is not the justice of God as much concerned to preserve the happiness of the meanest Insect which he has called into being, as of the greatest Man that ever lived? Are not all creatures we see made subservient to each others uses? and what is there in Man, that he only should be exempted from this common fate of all created Beings? The superiority of Man to that of other terrestrial animals is as inconsiderable, in proportion to the immense plan of universal Existence, as the difference of climate

ORIGIN of EVIL. 69

climate between the north and south end of the paper I now write upon, with regard to the heat and distance of the Sun. There is nothing leads us into so many Errors concerning the works and designs of Providence, as that foolish vanity that can persuade such insignificant creatures that all things were made for their service ; from whence they ridiculously set up Utility to themselves as the standard of Good, and conclude every thing to be Evil which appears injurious to them or their purposes. As well might a nest of Ants imagine this Globe of Earth created only for them to cast up into hillocks, and cloathed with grain and herbage for their sustenance ; then accuse their Creator for permitting spades to destroy them, and plows to lay waste their habitations ; the inconveniences of which they feel, but are utterly unable to comprehend their

70 The N A T U R E and

uses, as well as the relations they themselves bear to superior Beings. .

It is surprizing that none of those Philosophers, who were drove to the supposition of two first Causes, and many other absurdities, to account for the Origin of Evil, should not rather have chosen to impute it to the ministration of intermediate Beings ; and when they saw the happiness of all inferior animals dependent on our wills, should not have concluded, that the good order and well-being of the Universe might require, that ours should be as dependent on the wills of superior Beings, accountable like ourselves to one common Lord and Father of all things. This is the more wonderful, because the existence and influence of such Beings has been an article in the Creed of all Religions that
have

ORIGIN of EVIL. 71

have ever appeared in the World. In the beautiful system of the Pagan theology, their Sylvan and Household Deities, their Nymphs, Satyrs, and Fawns, were of this kind. All the barbarous nations that have ever been discovered, have been found to believe and adore intermediate spiritual Beings, both good and evil. The Jewish Religion not only confirms the belief of their existence, but of their tempting, deceiving, and tormenting mankind; and the whole system of Christianity is erected entirely on this foundation.

Thus, Sir, you see the good order of the whole, and the happiness it receives from a proper subordination, will sufficiently account for the sufferings of individuals; and all such should be considered but as the necessary taxes, which

72 The N A T U R E and

every member of this great Republick of the Universe is obliged to pay towards the support of the Community. It is no derogation from the divine Goodness, that these taxes are not always imposed equally in the present state of things; because as every individual is but a part of the great whole, so is the present state but a part of a long, or perhaps an eternal succession of others; and, like a single day in the natural life, has reference to many more, both past and to come. It is but as a page in a voluminous accompt, from which no judgment can be formed on the state of the whole; but of this we may be assured, that the ballance will some time or other be settled with justice and impartiality. The certainty therefore of a future state, in which we, and indeed all Creatures endued with sensation, shall some how or

6

other

ORIGIN of EVIL. 73

other exist, seems (if all our notions of Justice are not erroneous) as demonstrable as the Justice of their Creator; for if he is just, all such Creatures must have their account of happiness and misery somewhere adjusted with equity, and all Creatures capable of virtue and vice must, according to their behaviour, receive rewards and punishments; and, to render these punishments consistent with infinite goodness, they must not only be proportioned to their crimes, but also some way necessary to universal Good; for no Creatures can be called out of their primitive nothing by an all-wise and benevolent Creator, to be losers by their existence, or to be made miserable for no beneficial end, even by their own misbehaviour: so that all future misery, as well as present, must be subservient to happiness, or otherwise infinite Power,
joined

74 The N A T U R E and

joined with infinite Goodness, would have prevented both vice and punishment.

For this reason, amongst all the short-sighted conjectures of Man into the dispensations of Providence and a future State, the ancient doctrine of Transmigration seems the most rational and most consistent with his wisdom and goodness ; as by it all the unequal dispensations of things so necessary in one Life may be set right in another, and all creatures serve the highest and lowest, the most eligible and most burthensome offices of life by an equitable kind of rotation ; by which means their rewards and punishments may not only be well proportioned to their behaviour, but also subservient towards carrying on the Business of the Universe, and thus at the same time answer

ORIGIN of EVIL. 75

swer the purposes both of justice and utility. But the pride of Man will not suffer us to treat this subject with the seriousness it deserves ; but rejects as both impious and ridiculous every supposition of inferior creatures ever arriving at its own imaginary dignity, allowing at the same time the probability of human Nature being exalted to the angelick, a much wider and more extraordinary transition, but yet such a one as may probably be the natural consequence, as well as the reward of a virtuous life : nor is it less likely that our vices may debase us to the servile condition of inferior animals, in whose forms we may be severely punished for the injuries we have done to Mankind when amongst them, and be obliged in some measure to repair them, by performing the drudgeries tyrannically imposed upon us for their service.

From

The NATURE and

From what has been said, I think, it plainly appears that numberless Evils do actually exist, which could not have been excluded from the works of infinite goodness even by infinite power; and from hence it may be concluded, that there are none, which could; but that God has exerted all his omnipotence to introduce all possible happiness, and, as far as the imperfection of created things would permit, to exclude all misery, that is, all natural Evil, from the universal system; which notwithstanding will introduce itself in many circumstances, even in opposition to infinite Power.

The Origin of Moral Evil lies much deeper, and I will venture to assert has never yet been fathomed by the short line of human understanding. That I shall be able to reach it, I have by no means

ORIGIN of EVIL. 77

means the vanity to imagine : but, laying aside all preconceived opinions and systematical prejudice, I will in my next endeavour to come as near it as lies in the power of,

S I R, &c.

L E T-

ORIGIN OF EVIL

It is the vanity of man, his
desire for knowledge, and
his spiritual pride, I will in my next
lecture to show how it is in
the power of.

J. H. J.

LETTER IV.

ON

MORAL EVIL.

LETTER IV

My Dear Sir

LETTER IV.

On Moral Evil.

SIR,

I Must now leave that plain and easy road thro' which I have hitherto conducted you, and carry you thro' unfrequented paths, and ways untrodden by philosophic feet. Already, I think, the existence of Natural Evil has been sufficiently accounted for, without any derogation from the power, wisdom, or goodness of God. What next remains to be cleared up, is the Origin of Moral Evil; which, consistently with the same Divine Attributes, I have never seen ac-
G counted

82 The N A T U R E and

counted for by any Author, ancient or modern, in a manner that could give tolerable satisfaction to a rational Inquirer. Nor indeed can this be ever effectually performed, without at the same time taking into consideration all those most abstruse speculations concerning the nature of Virtue, Freewill, Fate, Grace, and Predestination, the debates of ages, and matter of innumerable folio's. To attempt this, therefore, in the compass of a Letter would be the highest presumption, did not I well know the clear and ready comprehension of the person to whom it is addressed; and also, that the most difficult of these kinds of disquisitions are usually better explained in a few lines, than by a thousand pages.

In order therefore to find out the true Origin of Moral Evil, it will be necessary,

ORIGIN of EVIL. 83

fary, in the first place, to inquire into its nature and essence; or what it is that constitutes one action Evil, and another Good. Various have been the opinions of various Authors on this Criterion of Virtue; and this variety has rendered that doubtful, which must otherwise have been clear and manifest to the meanest capacity. Some indeed have denied that there is any such thing, because different ages and nations have entertained different sentiments concerning it: but this is just as reasonable as to assert, that there are neither Sun, Moon, nor Stars, because Astronomers have supported different systems of the motions and magnitudes of these celestial bodies.— Some have placed it in conformity to truth, some to the fitness of things, and others to the will of God. But all this is merely superficial: they resolve us not

84 The N A T U R E and

why truth, or the fitness of things, are either eligible or obligatory, or why God should require us to act in one manner rather than another. The true reason of which can possibly be no other than this; because some actions produce happiness, and others misery: so that all Moral Good and Evil are nothing more than the production of Natural. This alone it is that makes truth preferable to falsehood, this that determines the fitness of things, and this that induces God to command some actions and forbid others. They who extoll the truth, beauty, and harmony of Virtue, exclusive of its consequences, deal but in pompous nonsense; and they who would persuade us, that Good and Evil are things indifferent, depending wholly on the will of God, do but confound the nature of things, as well as all our notions of God himself, by representing

ORIGIN of EVIL. 85

senting him capable of willing contradictions ; that is, that we should be, and be happy, and at the same time that we should torment and destroy each other ; for injuries cannot be made benefits, pain cannot be made pleasure, and consequently vice cannot be made virtue by any power whatever. It is the consequences therefore of all human actions that must stamp their value. So far as the general practice of any action tends to produce Good, and introduce happiness into the world, so far we may pronounce it virtuous ; so much Evil as it occasions, such is the degree of vice it contains. I say the general practice, because we must always remember in judging by this rule, to apply it only to the general species of actions, and not to particular actions ; for the infinite wisdom of God, desirous to set bounds to the destructive conse-

86 The N A T U R E and

quences which must otherwise have followed from the universal depravity of mankind, has so wonderfully contrived the nature of things, that our most vicious actions may sometimes accidentally and collaterally produce Good. Thus, for instance, robbery may disperse useless hoards to the benefit of the publick; Adultery may bring heirs, and good humour too, into many families, where they would otherwise have been wanting; and Murder free the world from tyrants and oppressors. Luxury maintains its thousands, and Vanity its ten thousands. Superstition and Arbitrary Power contribute to the grandeur of many nations, and the liberties of others are preserved by the perpetual contentions of avarice, knavery, selfishness, and ambition: and thus the worst of vices, and the worst of Men are often compelled

ORIGIN of EVIL. 87

led by Providence to serve the most beneficial purposes, contrary to their own malevolent tendencies and inclinations ; and thus private vices become publick benefits by the force only of accidental circumstances. But this impeaches not the truth of the Criterion of Virtue before mentioned, the only solid foundation on which any true system of ethicks can be built, the only plain, simple, and uniform rule by which we can pass any judgment on our actions ; but by this we may be enabled, not only to determine which are good, and which are evil, but almost mathematically to demonstrate the proportion of Virtue or Vice which belongs to each, by comparing them with the degrees of happiness or misery which they occasion. But tho' the production of happiness is the Essence of virtue, it is by no means the

88 The N A T U R E and

End : the great End is the probation of Mankind, or the giving them an opportunity of exalting or degrading themselves in another state by their behaviour in the present. And thus indeed it answers two most important purposes ; those are, the conservation of our happiness, and the test of our obedience : for had not such a test seemed necessary to God's infinite wisdom, and productive of universal Good, he would never have permitted the happiness of Men, even in this life, to have depended on so precarious a tenure, as their mutual good behaviour to each other. For it is observable, that he who best knows our formation, has trusted no one thing of importance to our reason or virtue : he trusts only to our appetites for the support of the individual, and the continuance of our species ; to our vanity, or compassion, for
our

our bounty to others ; and to our fears, for the preservation of ourselves ; often to our vices for the support of Government, and sometimes to our follies for the preservation of our Religion. But since some test of our obedience was necessary, nothing sure could have been commanded for that end so fit and proper, and at the same time so useful, as the practice of virtue ; nothing have been so justly rewarded with happiness, as the production of happiness in conformity to the will of God. It is this conformity alone which adds merit to virtue, and constitutes the essential difference between Morality and Religion. Morality obliges Men to live honestly and soberly, because such behaviour is most conducive to publick happiness, and consequently to their own ; Religion, to pursue the same course, because conformable to the will of their Creator.

90 The N A T U R E and

Creator. Morality induces them to embrace virtue from prudential considerations ; Religion, from those of gratitude and obedience. Morality therefore, entirely abstracted from Religion, can have nothing meritorious in it ; it being but wisdom, prudence, or good œconomy, which, like health, beauty, or riches, are rather obligations conferred upon us by God, than merits in us towards him ; for tho' we may be justly punished for injuring ourselves, we can claim no reward for self-preservation ; as suicide deserves punishment and infamy, but a Man deserves no reward or honours for not being guilty of it. This I take to be the meaning of all those passages in our Scriptures in which Works are represented to have no merit without Faith ; that is, not without believing in historical facts, in creeds, and articles ;

but

ORIGIN of EVIL. 91

but without being done in pursuance of our belief in God, and in obedience to his commands. And now, having mentioned Scripture, I cannot omit observing, that the Christian is the only religious or moral Institution in the world that ever set in a right light these two material points, the Essence and the End of Virtue ; that ever founded the one in the production of happiness, that is, in universal benevolence, or, in their language, Charity to all Men ; the other, in the probation of Man, and his obedience to his Creator. Sublime and magnificent as was the philosophy of the Ancients, all their moral systems were deficient in these two important articles. They were all built on the sandy foundations of the innate beauty of virtue, or ethusiastick patriotism ; and their great point in view was the contemptible reward of human glory ;

glory; foundations which were by no means able to support the magnificent structures which they erected upon them; for the beauty of virtue, independent of its effects, is unmeaning nonsense; patriotism which injures mankind in general for the sake of a particular country, is but a more extended selfishness, and really criminal; and all human glory but a mean and ridiculous delusion. The whole affair then of Religion and Morality, the subject of so many thousand volumes, is in short no more than this: The Supreme Being, infinitely good, as well as powerful, desirous to diffuse happiness by all possible means, has created innumerable ranks and orders of Beings, all subservient to each other by proper subordination. One of these is occupied by Man, a creature endued with such a certain degree of know-

ORIGIN of EVIL. 93

knowledge, reason, and free-will, as is suitable to his situation, and placed for a time on this globe as in a school of probation and education. Here he has an opportunity given him of improving or debasing his nature, in such a manner as to render himself fit for a rank of higher perfection and happiness, or to degrade himself to a state of greater imperfection and misery; necessary indeed towards carrying on the business of the Universe, but very grievous and burthensome to those individuals, who, by their own misconduct, are obliged to submit to it. The test of this his behaviour, is doing good, that is, co-operating with his Creator, as far as his narrow sphere of action will permit, in the production of happiness. And thus the happiness and misery of a future state will be the just reward or punishment of promoting or

pre-

94 The N A T U R E and

preventing happiness in this. So artificially by this means is the nature of all human virtue and vice contrived, that their rewards and punishments are woven as it were into their very essence ; their immediate effects give us a foretaste of their future ; and their fruits in the present life are the proper samples of what they must unavoidable produce in another. We have Reason given us to distinguish these consequences, and regulate our conduct ; and lest that should neglect its post, Conscience also is appointed as an instinctive kind of monitor, perpetually to remind us both of our interest and our duty.

When we consider how wonderfully the practice of Virtue is thus enforced by our great Creator, and that all which he requires of us under that title is only to be

ORIGIN of EVIL. 95

be happy, that is, to make each other so; and when at the same time we look round us, and see the whole race of mankind thro' every successive generation tormenting, injuring, and destroying each other, and perpetually counteracting the gracious designs of their Maker, it is a most astonishing paradox how all this comes to pass; why God should suffer himself to be thus defeated in his best purposes by creatures of his own making; or why Man should be made with dispositions to defeat them at the expence of his own present and future happiness; why infinite Goodness should form creatures inclined to oppose its own benevolent designs, or why infinite Power should thus suffer itself to be opposed.

There are some, I know, who extricate themselves from this difficulty very concisely

cisely by asserting, that there is in fact no such original depravity, no such innate propensity to vice in human nature ; but as this assertion is directly contrary to the express declaration of the Scriptures, to the opinion of the Philosophers and Moralists of all ages, and to the most constant, and unvariable experience of every hour ; I think they no more deserve an answer, than they who would affirm, that a stone has no tendency to the Center by its natural gravity, or that Flame has no inclination to ascend.

But the usual solution applied to this difficulty by the ablest Philosophers and Divines, with which they themselves, and most of their readers, seem perfectly satisfied, is comprehended in the following reasoning : That Man came perfect out of the hands of his Creator, both in
virtue

ORIGIN of EVIL. 97

virtue and happiness, but it being more eligible that he should be a free-agent than a mere machine, God endued him with Freedom of will ; from the abuse of which Freedom, all Misery and Sin, that is, all natural and moral Evils, derive their existence : from all such therefore the Divine Goodness is sufficiently justified, by reason they could not be prevented without the loss of superior Good ; for to create Men free, and at the same time compell them to be virtuous, is utterly impossible.

But whatever air of demonstration this argument may assume, by whatever fam'd Preachers it may have been used, or by whatever learned Audience it may have been approved, I will venture to affirm, that it is false in all its Principles, and in its Conclusion also ; and I think it may

H

be

98 The N A T U R E and

be clearly shewn, that God did not make Man absolutely Perfect, nor absolutely Free: nor, if he had, would this in the least have justified the introduction of Wickedness and Misery.

That Man came Perfect, that is indued with all possible Perfections, out of the hands of his Creator, is evidently a false notion derived from the Philosophers of the first ages, founded on their ignorance of the Origin of Evil, and inability to account for it on any other Hypothesis: they understood not that the universal System required Subordination, and consequently comparative Imperfections; nor that in the Scale of Beings there must be some where such a creature as Man with all his infirmities about him: that the total removal of these would be altering his very Nature; and that

. ORIGIN of EVIL: 99

that as soon as he became Perfect, he must cease to be Man. The Truth of this, I think, has been sufficiently proved ; and besides, the very supposition of a Being originally perfect, and yet capable of rendering itself wicked and miserable, is undoubtedly a Contradiction, that very power being the highest imperfection imaginable.

That God made Man perfectly Free is no less false ; Men have certainly such a degree of Free-will as to make them accountable, and justly punishable, for the abuse of it ; but absolute and independent Free-will is what, I believe, no created Being can be possessed of. Our actions proceed from our Wills, but our wills must be derived from the natural dispositions implanted in us by the Author of our Being : Wrong elections pro-

100 The NATURE and

ceed from wrong apprehensions, or unruly passions; and these from our original Frame or accidental Education: these must determine all our actions, for we have no power to act differently, these previous circumstances continuing exactly the same. Had God thought proper to have made all Men with the same heads, and the same hearts, which he has given to the most virtuous of the species, they would all have excelled in the same virtues: or had the Bias implanted in Human Nature drawn as strongly towards the good side, as it now apparently does towards the bad, it would have operated as successfully, and with as little infringement on human Liberty: Men, as well as all other animals, are exactly fitted for the purposes they are designed for; and have inclinations and dispositions given them accordingly: He,
who

ORIGIN of EVIL: 101

who implanted patience in the lamb, obedience in the Horse, fidelity in the dog, and innocence in the dove, might as easily have inspired the breast of Man with these and all other virtues; and then his actions would have certainly corresponded with his Formation: therefore, in the strict philosophical Sense, we have certainly no Free-will; that is, none independent of our Frame, our Natures, and the Author of them.

But were both these propositions true, were Men originally created both perfect and free, yet this would by no means justify the introduction of moral Evil; because, if his perfection was immediately to be destroyed by his Free-will, he might as well never have been possesst of the one, and much better have been prevented from making use of the other:

102 The N A T U R E and

let us dispute therefore as long as we please, it must eternally be the same thing, whether a Creator of infinite power and knowledge created Beings originally wicked and miserable, or gave them a power to make themselves so, foreknowing they would employ that power to their own destruction.

If moral Evil therefore cannot be derived from the Abuse of Free-will in Man, from whence can we trace its origin? Can it proceed from a just, a wise, and a benevolent God? Can such a God form Creatures with dispositions to do Evil, and then punish them for acting in conformity to those evil dispositions? Strange and astonishing indeed must this appear to us, who know so little of the universal Plan! but is far, I think, from being irreconcilable with the justice of
the

ORIGIN of EVIL. 103

the Supreme disposer of all things : for let us but once acknowledge the truth of our first great proposition, (and most certainly true it is) that natural Evils exist from some necessity in the Nature of things, which no power can dispense with or prevent, the expediency of moral Evil will perhaps follow on course : for if misery could not be excluded from the works of a benevolent Creator by infinite power, these miseries must be endured by some creatures or other for the good of the whole : and if there were none capable of wickedness, then they must fall to the share of those who are perfectly innocent. Here again we see our difficulties arise from our wrong notions of Omnipotence, and forgetting how many difficulties it has to contend with : in the present instance it is obliged either to afflict Innocence or be the cause of Wickedness ; it has plainly no other Option : what then

104 The NATURE and

could infinite Wisdom, Justice and Goodness do in this situation more consistent with itself, than to call into being Creatures formed with such depravity in their dispositions, as to induce many of them to act in such a manner as to render themselves proper subjects for such necessary sufferings, and yet at the same time indued with such a degree of Reason and Free-will as to put it in the power of every individual to escape them by their good behaviour: Such a Creature is Man; so corrupt, base, cruel and wicked as to convert these unavoidable miseries into just punishments, and at the same time so sensible of his own depravity and the fatal consequences of guilt, as to be well able to correct the one and to avoid the other. Here we see a substantial Reason for the depravity of Man, and the admittance of moral Evil in these circumstances seems

ORIGIN of EVIL. 105

seems not only compatible with the justice of God, but one of the highest instances of his consummate wisdom in ordering and disposing all things in the best manner their imperfect natures will admit.

I presume not by what has been here said to determine on the councils of the Almighty, to triumph in the compleat discovery of the Origin of Moral Evil, or to assert that this is the certain or sole Cause of its existence; I propose it only as a Guess concerning the reason of its admission, more probable, and less derogatory from the divine wisdom, and justice, than any, that has hitherto been offered for that purpose.

There is undoubtedly something farther in the general Depravity of Mankind than we are aware of, and probably many great and wise ends are answered by it

to

106 The NATURE and

to us totally incomprehensible. God as has been shewn, would never have permitted the existence of natural Evil, but from the impossibility of preventing it without the loss of superior Good: and on the same principal the admission of moral Evil is equally consistent with the divine Goodness: and who is he so knowing in the whole stupendous system of Nature as to assert, that the Wickedness of some Beings may not, by means unconceivable to us, be beneficial to innumerable unknown Orders of others? or that the Punishments of some may not contribute to the Felicity of numbers infinitely superior?

To this purpose the learned Hugenius says with great sagacity *Præterea credibile est, ipsa illa animi vitia magnæ hominum parti, non sine summo concilio data esse:*
Cum

ORIGIN of EVIL. 107

Cum enim Dei providentiâ talis sit Tellus, ejusque incolæ, quales cernimus, absurdum enim foret existimare omnia hæc alia facta esse, quam ille valuerit, sciveritque futura.

But let us not forget that this Necessity of Vice and Punishment, and its subserviency to publick Good, makes no alteration in their natures with regard to Man; for, tho the wisdom of God may extract from the wickness of Men some remote benefits to the Universe; yet that alters not the case with regard to them, nor in the least extenuates their Guilt. He has given them reason sufficient to inform them, that their injuries to each other are displeasing to him, and Free-will sufficient to refrain from such actions, and may therefore punish their disobedience without any infringe-

* Cosmotheoros, Lib. 1. pag. 34.

ment of justice : He knows indeed, that though none are under any compulsion to do Evil, yet that they are all so framed, that many will certainly do it ; and He knows also that incomprehensible secret why it is necessary that many should : but His knowledge having no relation to their determinations renders not their vices less criminal, nor the punishment of them less equitable : for, tho', with regard to God, Vice may be perhaps the consequence of Misery ; that is, Men may be made inclined to Vice, in order to render them proper objects of such a degree of Misery as was unavoidably necessary, and previously determined for the sake of publick Good ; yet, in regard to Man, Misery is the consequence of Vice ; that is, all human Vices produce Misery, and are justly punished by its infliction.

If

ORIGIN of EVIL. 109

If it be objected that this makes God the Author of Sin, I answer, God is, and must be the Author of every thing; and to say that any thing is, or happens, independent of the first Cause, is to say that something exists, or happens, without any Cause at all. God is the Author, if it may be so expressed, of all the natural Evils in the Universe; that is, of the fewest possible in the Nature of things; and why may he not be the Author of all moral Evil in the same manner and on the same principle? If natural Evil owes its existence to Necessity, why may not moral? If Misery brings with it its Utility, why may not Wickedness?

“ If storms and earthquakes break not

“ Heav’ns design,

“ Why then a Borgia or a Cataline!”

Wherefore it ought always to be considered,

110 The NATURE and

sidered, that, tho' Sin in Us, who see no farther than the Evils it produces, is Evil, and justly punishable; yet in God, who sees the causes and connections of all things, and the necessity of its admission, that admission may be no Evil at all, and that necessity a sufficient vindication of his Goodness.

But it may be alledged that this principle totally changes the Nature of Vice, destroys the Criterion before affixed to it, and encourages the universal practise of wickedness: for if Moral Evil, and the punishment of it are necessary towards promoting universal Good, then the more wicked men are the more they promote that Good; and the more they cooperate with their Creator in compleating his great and benevolent plan of universal happiness. But this reasoning is extremely fallacious: because no collateral, remote,

ORIGIN of EVIL. 111

mote, unknown and undesigned Good resulting from Vice can alter the nature of it, or divest it of criminality; and moreover if that Good arises only from its punishment, so far is it from an encouragement to wickedness, that it proves only that the punishment of it is necessary, and unpreventable; nay in its nature incapable of remission, without a penal satisfaction from some Being or other, nor does its cooperation with the designs of providence render it less criminal, or less worthy of his just indignation: all Histories are filled with instances of the wickedness of Men conspiring to bring about the Councils of the Almighty; such were the Ambition and ferocity of the Romans, the obstinacy of the Jews, the cruelty of Herod, and the treachery of Judas, yet were these never esteemed for that reason meritorious, or innocent.

From

112 The NATURE and

From this important proposition, that all Natural Evil derives its existence from necessity, and all Moral from expediency arising from that necessity; I say, from this important proposition, well considered and pursued, such new lights might be struck out as could not fail, if directed by the hands of Learning and Impartiality, to lead the human Mind thro' unknown regions of speculation, and to produce the most surprising and useful discoveries in Ethicks, Metaphysics, and in Christianity too: I add Christianity, because it is a Master-Key, which will, I am certain, at once unlock all the mysterious and perplexing doctrines of that amazing Institution, and explain fairly, without the least assistance from theological artifice, all those abstruse speculations of Original Sin, Grace and Predestination, and vicarious punishments, which

ORIGIN of EVIL. 113

which the most learned, for want of this Clue, have never yet been able to make consistent with Reason or Common-sense.

In the first place, for instance, the Doctrine of Original Sin is really nothing more than the very System here laid down, into which we have been led by closely pursuing Reason, and without which the Origin of Moral Evil cannot be accounted for on any principle whatever. Indeed, according to the common notions of the absolute Omnipotence of God, and the absolute Free-will in Man, it is most absurd and impious, as it represents the Deity voluntarily bringing Men into Being with depraved Dispositions, tending to no good purposes, and then arbitrarily punishing them for the sins which they occasion with torments which answer no ends, either of their re-

I formation

114 The NATURE and

formation or utility to the Universe: but when we see, by the foregoing explanation, the difficulties with which Omnipotence was environed, and that it was obliged by the necessity of Natural Evils to admit Moral, all these absurdities at once vanish, and the Original Depravity of Man appears fairly consistent with the Justice and even Goodness of his Creator.

The Doctrines of Predestination and Grace as set forth in the Scriptures, on the most impartial Interpretation, I take to be these: that some Men come into the world with dispositions so extremely bad, that God foreknows that they will certainly be guilty of many crimes, and in consequence be punished for them; that to others He has given better dispositions, and moreover protects them from Vice

I by

ORIGIN of EVIL. 115

by a powerful but invisible influence, in the language of those writings called Grace: this Scheme has appeared to many so partial and unjust that they have totally rejected it, and endeavoured, by forced interpretations, to explain it quite out of the Bible, in contradiction to all the sense of language and the whole tenour of those writings: and indeed, on the old plan of God's absolute Omnipotence, uncontrouled by any previous necessity, in the nature of things, to admit both Natural and Moral Evil, it is highly derogatory from His wisdom and goodness; but, on the supposition of that previous Necessity, there appears nothing incredible in it, nor the least inconsistent with divine Justice; because, if God was obliged by the nature of things, and for the good of the whole, to suffer some to be wicked, and consequently miserable,

116 The NATURE and

he certainly might protect others both from guilt and punishment. He in this light may be compared to the Commander of a numerous army, who, tho' he is obliged to expose many to danger, and some to destruction, yet protects others with ramparts and covert-ways ; but so long as he exercises this power for the good of the whole, these distinctions amongst individuals ought never to be imputed to Partiality or Injustice.

The Doctrine of Sacrifice, or Vicarious punishment, is the most universal, and yet exclusive of this plan the most absurd, of all religious Tenets that ever entered into the Mind of Man : so absurd is it, that how it came to be so universal is not easy to be accounted for : Pagans, Jews and Christians, have all agreed in this one point, tho' differing in all others ;
and

ORIGIN of EVIL. 117

and have all treated it as a self-evident principle, that the Sins of one Creature might be attoned for by the Sufferings of another : but from whence they derived this strange opinion none of them have pretended to give any account, or to produce in its defence the least shadow of a Reason : for that there should be any manner of connection between the Miseries of one Being and the Guilt of another ; or, that the punishing the Innocent, and excusing the Guilty, should be a mark of God's Detestation of Sin ; or, that two acts of the highest Injustice should make one of Justice, is so fundamentally wrong, so diametrically opposite to common-sense, and all our ideas of justice, that it is equally astonishing that so many should believe it themselves or impose it upon others. But on the foregoing theory this also may be a little

118 The NATURE and

cleared up, and will by no means appear so very inconsistent with Reason: for if a certain quantity of Misery in some part of the Universal System is necessary to the Happiness and Well-being of the Whole; and if this necessity arises from its answering some purposes incomprehensible to the human Understanding; I will ask any impartial Reasoner, Why the Sufferings of one Being may not answer the same Ends, or be as effectual towards promoting Universal Good as the Sufferings of another? If the Miseries of Individuals are to be looked upon as taxes which they are obliged to pay towards the support of the Publick, why may not the Sufferings of one Creature serve the same purposes, or absolve as much of that necessary tax as the Sufferings of another, and on that account be accepted as a payment or satisfaction

ORIGIN of EVIL. 119

tisfaction for their Sufferings; that is, for the Sufferings due to the Publick Utility from the punishment of their crimes, without which the Happiness of the whole could not subsist, unless they should be replaced by the Sufferings of others? As we are entirely ignorant why Misery has any existence at all, or what interest it serves in the general System of things, this may possibly be the case for any thing we know; and that it is not, I am certain no one can affirm with Reason: Reason indeed cannot inform us that it is so, but that it may be, is undoubtedly no contradiction to Reason.

If I mistake not it might be shewn, that this principle of the necessity of Moral Evil, and its punishment, is the foundation on which the whole fabrick

120 The N A T U R E and

of the Christian Dispensation is erected ; the principle itself is avowed by the Author of that Dispensation in clear, and exprefs words : *It must needs be, says he, that Offences come ; but woe unto that Man by whom the Offence cometh.* That is, it is necessary towards compleating the designs of providence, that some Men should commit crimes ; but as no Individual is compelled by necessity to commit them, Woe unto all, who are thus guilty. He came by his excellent precepts, and example, to diminish the quantity of Moral Evil in the World, and of Misery consequential from its punishment, but found it necessary to replace that Misery in some degree by his own voluntary, and unmerited Sufferings : and perhaps the unparalell'd tortures inflicted on his disciples and followers might be also necessary, and subservient to the same purposes.

From

ORIGIN of EVIL. 121

From what has been here said, I think, it is evident that the Origin of Evil is by no means so difficult to account for as at first sight it appears ; for it has been plainly shewn that most of those we usually complain of are Evils of Imperfection, which are rather the absence of comparative Advantages than positive Evils, and therefore, properly speaking, no Evils at all ; and as such, ought to be intirely struck out of the Catalogue. It has likewise been made appear, that of natural Evils, which are the Sufferings of sensitive Beings, many are but the consequences naturally resulting from the particular circumstances of particular ranks in the scale of Existence, which could not have been omitted without the destruction of the Whole ; and that many more are in all probability necessary, by means to us incomprehensible, to the
pro-

production of Universal Good. Lastly, it has been suggested, that from this necessity of Natural Evils may arise the expediency of Moral, without which those necessary Sufferings must have been without less justice inflicted on perfect innocence; and moreover, that it is probable Moral Evil, as well as Natural, may have some ultimate tendency to the Good of the Whole; and that the crimes and punishments of some Beings may, by some way or other, totally beyond the reach of our narrow capacities, contribute to the Felicity of much greater Numbers.

This plan, Sir, I am persuaded is not far distant from the Truth; and on this Foundation, if I mistake not, a System of Morality and Religion, more compleat and solid, more consistent with Reason, and with Christianity too, might be erected

ORIGIN of EVIL. 123

erected than any which has yet appeared: I heartily wish that some person of more learning, abilities and leisure than myself, (and much more, I am sure, of all it would require) encouraged by your Favour, and assisted by your Sagacity, would undertake it, and condescend to fill up these out-lines so inaccurately sketched out by,

S I R, &c.

L E T-

erected than any which has yet appeared:
 I heartily wish that some portion of more
 training, advice and labour than myself
 (and much more, I am sure, of all it
 would require) encouraged by your Ex-
 cellency, and assisted by your sagacity, would
 undertake it, and conduct it to all up to the
 last line to successfully finished out by

318. 85.

J. H. T.

LETTER V.

ON

POLITICAL EVILS.

LETTER

ON

POLITICAL FALLES

LETTER V.

On Political Evils.

SIR,

ACCORDING to my proposed Plan there still remain two sorts of Evils to be accounted for, Political and Religious; under which heads, (if you are not already tired with so abstruse and unentertaining a correspondence) I shall endeavour to shew you, that it is utterly impossible, even for Omnipotence itself, to give a perfect Government, or a perfect Religion to an imperfect Creature; and therefore, that the numberless imperfections inherent in all human Governments and Religions, are not imputable to
God,

128 The NATURE and

God, nor any defect of power, wisdom, or goodness in Him ; but only to the inferiority of Man's station in the Universe, which necessarily exposes him to Natural and Moral Evils, and must, for the same Reason, to Political and Religious ; which are indeed but the Consequences of the other. Superior Beings may probably form to themselves, or receive from their Creator, Government without Tyranny or Corruption, and Religions without Delusions or Absurdities ; but Man cannot : God indeed may remove him into so exalted a Society ; but whilst he continues to be a Man, he must be subject to innumerable Evils ; amongst which those I call Political and Religious are far from being the least.

But as these two kinds of Evils are very different, they will require different
con-

considerations ; I shall therefore in the present confine myself to the Political only, by which I mean all those grievous burthens of Tyranny and Oppression, of Violence and Corruption, of War and Desolation, under which all ages and nations have ever groaned on account of Government : little less destructive perhaps to the Happiness of Mankind, than even Anarchy itself ; but which, notwithstanding, are so woven into the very Essence of all Human Governments from the Depravity of Man, that without them none can be either established, maintained or administered, nor consequently can they be prevented without changing that Depravity into Perfection ; that is, without a compleat Alteration of Human Nature. How this comes to pass may be easily explained by a short examination first into the nature and origin of

130 The N A T U R E and
Government in general, and afterwards
into those of particular Forms and Poli-
cies ; than which nothing has been more
commonly misunderstood and misrepre-
sented.

As to Government in general, it is no
wonder, that it is so productive of Evil,
since its very Nature consists of Power
trusted in the hands of such imperfect
and vicious Creatures as Men, and exer-
cised over others as imperfect and vicious
as themselves ; in which there must be
Pride, Avarice and Cruelty on one Side ;
Envy, Ignorance and Obstinacy on the
other ; and Injustice and Self-Interest on
both. Its Origin also arises from the
same impure source of human Imperfec-
tion ; that is, Men being neither wise
nor honest enough, to pursue their com-
mon and mutual interests without Com-
pulsion,

ORIGIN of EVIL. 131

pulsion, are obliged to submit to some, in order to secure their lives and properties from the depredations of all: but tho' this Necessity drives them into some kind of Government, yet it can never decide who shall govern, because all Men being by Nature equal, every one has an equal right to this superiority: this therefore can be determined only by more Imperfections; that is, by the Struggles of Ambition, Treachery, Violence and Corruption; from success in which universal scramble are derived all the mighty Empires of the Earth: One Man at first by some of these methods acquiring the command over a few, then by their aid extending his power over greater numbers, and at last by the assistance of those numbers, united by the advantage of plundering others, subduing all opposition: and thus we see all human Govern-

132 The NATURE and

ment is the Offspring of Violence and Corruption, and must inherit the imperfection of both its parents. It is plain also that national Governments can never be supported by any other methods than those by which they were at first rais'd ; for, being all independent of each other, and retaining still their original inclination to devour each other ; and having no superior tribunal to refer to for justice, they can have no means to secure their own possessions, or to repel their mutual encroachments, but by force, which is call'd the Right of War ; that is, the right of doing all the wrong that lies in their power : For war, however dignified with honours and encomiums by conquerors and their flatterers, is in fact nothing else but robbery and murder. Nations having no more right to plunder each other than Parishes, nor Men to
kill

ORIGIN of EVIL. 133

kill one another in their political than in their private capacities.

If we look into the internal constitutions of all these Governments, we shall find likewise, that they must be administered by the same violence and corruption to which they are indebted for their Origin; that is, by hiring one part of the society to force the other into subjection; and that none of them ever subsisted any longer than whilst the stronger part, not always the most numerous, found it for their advantage to keep the weaker in obedience: for it should be ever remembered, as the fundamental of all politics, that Men will never submit to each other merely for the sake of publick Utility, too remote a benefit to make any impression on the dull senses of the multitude; but must be always beat or bribed

134 The N A T U R E and

into obedience. Higher orders of Beings may submit to each other on nobler motives, from their sense of Virtue or of universal Benefit; but Man can be governed by nothing but the Fear of Punishment or the Hopes of Reward; that is, by Self-interest, the great Principle that operates in the political World in the same manner that Attraction does in the natural, preserving order and restraining every thing to its proper course by the continual endeavours of every individual to draw all power and property to himself.

If we descend to the examination of particular forms of government, we shall see them all exactly correspond with this general plan; we shall find that none of them owe their Origin to patriarchal power, the divine right of Princes, or the

ORIGIN of EVIL. 135

the uninfluenced choice of the People ; things which never existed but in the idle dreams of visionary politicians ; but all to the struggles of Ambition and Self-Interest, subsiding at last into some kind of Policy ; either into absolute Monarchy or some species of popular Government more or less remote from it, as the different parts of it have had Strength or Fortune to prevail ; all which must be carried on by the same vitious methods of Violence or Corruption, and consequently be productive of numberless, if not of equal, Evils.

In absolute Monarchies, for instance, great violence must be exercised to keep men, by nature equal, in so unnatural a Subjection ; this must produce plots, rebellions, civil wars and massacres ; and these must require more Violence to re-

136 The NATURE and

press them : but this Violence cannot be used without much Corruption ; for it is not the person of the sovereign, his crown and scepter, that can preserve his authority, nor can he destroy thousands with his own hand, like a Hero in Romance ; a powerful army must be kept in pay to enslave the people, and a numerous clergy to deceive them ; whose ambition, avarice, luxury and cruelty must be satiated with the blood and treasures of that very People as a reward for their services : hence infinite Evils must arise, the lives, liberties and properties of all must be dependent on the capricious will of One, or, what is worse, on the wills of his pimps, flatterers and favorites : justice must be perverted by favour, and that favour can seldom be obtained but by adulation, servility and treachery :
this

ORIGIN of EVIL. 137

this produces all kinds of Moral Evils, and these beget more Political.

In Democratical Governments, if there is less Violence there is more Corruption; which in these indeed is the Basis of all Power, and productive of the most mischievous effects; here all things are at the disposal of an ignorant and giddy Multitude, always led to their own destruction by the flimsy eloquence and pretended patriotism of Knaves, Fools, and enthusiastic Madmen; or commonly of some extraordinary Genius, formed for popularity by a lucky composition of all these excellent ingredients; all subordination is subverted; and the most insolent and vitious of the people must be caressed, bribed and intoxicated, and by that means rendered still more insolent and vitious; and all who by these methods acquire their

138 The NATURE and

their favour must be no less vitious than themselves. If in despotic Governments Power cannot be attained but by Servility and Adulation, in Democratical it can never be acquired but by the more pernicious Vices of Turbulence and Faction ; for which Reason these are ever sure to be governed by the most wicked, ambitious, avaricious and mischievous of their Members.

Mixed Governments, tho' perhaps productive of fewer Evils than either of the former, yet must necessarily partake of those belonging to both, and be supported by more or less of Violence, as they more or less approach the Despotic ; or of Corruption, as they come nearer to the Democratical Principles : the further they shrink from the iron scourges of the one, the more will they be entangled in the
golden

ORIGIN of EVIL. 139

golden fetters of the other ; for Corruption must always increase in due proportion to the decrease of arbitrary Power, since where there is less power to command obedience, there must be more bribery to purchase it, or there can be no Government at all. These have besides many Evils peculiar to themselves, the very excellence of these sort of Constitutions being productive of inconveniences : for this excellence consisting principally in this, that their different parts are able to counteract each others mischievous intentions, the reins of Government are kept tight only by each pulling a different way, and they subsist by a perpetual contention, like a body kept alive by the opposite effects of contrary poisons : a very precarious and uneasy kind of existence ! This exposes them in some measure to all the Evils incident to both

both absolute and popular Governments, tho' in a less degree: to the oppression of the one, and the licentiousness of the other, to factions at home, weakness abroad, and infinite expence in all parts of their administration: yet are these mixed constitutions the very best that human wisdom could ever discover for the regulation of human Societies.

All these Evils arise from the Nature of Things and the Nature of Man, and not from the Weakness or Wickedness of particular Men, or their accidental ascendancy in particular Governments: the degrees of them may indeed be owing to these, but their existence is immutable. So long as the Imperfection of human nature continues, so long will Princes, for the most part, convert that power with which they are trusted for the
fake

ORIGIN of EVIL. 141

fake of publick Utility, to the ignoble ends of their own avarice, luxury or ambition; so long will the people prefer present Self-interest to remote benefits arising from national prosperity; and so long will corrupt ministers employ this popular venality to their own private advantage; and how many soever are lapt off,

Non deficit aureus alter.

It is the misapprehension of this, that is the fundamental error of all ignorant, but well-meaning, speculative politicians, of all others the most untractable in government, and mischievous in business, the engines with which knaves work, and the ladders on which they mount to preferment: who endeavour to destroy all governments, because they are not perfect; and oppose all administrations,

142 The NATURE and

because they cannot govern men by such means as they are not design'd, or form'd to be governed by : who, by a Syſiphæan kind of politics, are ever labouring to roll up a ſtone, that muſt recoil upon them ; and to render that faultleſs, which infinite power and wiſdom cannot exempt from inconveniences, abuſes, and imperfections.

Should one innumerate all of this kind, which cannot be excluded from Government without the total alteration of human nature, they would be endleſs ; to inſtance but a few : all political bodies, like the natural, muſt have the ſeeds of their own diſſolution ſown in their very eſſence, and like them be deſtroyed by every exceſs ; by exceſs of poverty or riches, of ſlavery or liberty, of ignorance or knowledge, of adverſity or proſperity :

ORIGIN of EVIL. 143

city : a strong proof of their imperfection, that they cannot bear excess even of the greatest good ; and yet they cannot be formed of more durable materials, so long as they are constituted of human creatures. All power trusted in the hands of so imperfect a creature as man, must be pernicious and oppressive, and yet somewhere such power must be trusted. All human Laws must be liable to misconstruction, and uncertainty, yet without Laws property cannot be secur'd. All popular Elections must be attended with corruption, licentiousness, and the perversion of justice, yet without them the liberty of no country can be preserv'd. All national provisions for the poor must not only be encouragements to idleness, but productive of contests, and oftentimes of cruelty, yet without such many honest but unfortunate people must inevitably

144 The NATURE and

evitably perish. All religious tests, and subscriptions, are in their own natures subversive of truth and morals, yet the folly of one part of mankind, and the knavery of the other, will scarcely permit any Government to subsist without them. Trade and wealth are the strength and the pursuit of every wise nation, yet these must certainly produce Luxury, which no less certainly must produce their destruction. All War is a complication of all manner of Evils natural and moral, that is, of misery and wickedness; yet without it national contentions can never be determin'd. No Government can be carry'd on, nor subordination preserv'd, without forms, and ceremonials, pomp, and parade; yet all such, from the inferiority of human nature giving itself airs of grandeur and magnificence, and the despicable expedients it

is

ORIGIN of EVIL. 145

is obliged to have recourse to support it, must always have something mean and ridiculous in them to exalted understandings. All Governments are in a great measure upheld by absurd notions infus'd into the minds of the people, of the divine right of some particular person or family to reign over them; a foolish partiality for some particular spot of ground; an outrageous zeal for some religion which they cannot understand, or a senseless pursuit of Glory which they can never attain; these are all false principles, yet without them, or some like them, no nation can long subsist: they can never be defended by reason, yet reason can produce no others that can supply their places. Every flourishing nation endeavours to improve Arts, and cultivate Reason and good sense; yet, if these are extended too far, or too universally diffus'd,

L

146 The NATURE and

fus'd, no national government or national religion can long stand their ground; for it is with old Establishments as with old houses, their deformities are commonly their supports, and these can never be remov'd without endangering the whole fabrick. In short, no Government can be administer'd without in some degree deceiving the people, oppressing the mean, indulging the great, corrupting the venal, opposing factions to each other, and temporising with parties.

It is this necessity for Evil in all Government, which gives that weight and popularity, which usually attends all those who oppose, and calumniate any Government whatever; appearing always to have reason on their side, because the Evils of all power are conspicuous to the meanest capacity, whereas the necessity for those

ORIGIN of EVIL. 147

Evils are perceivable only to superior understandings: every one can feel the burthen of taxes, and see the inconveniences of armies, places, and pensions, that must encrease them, but very few are able to comprehend that no Government can be supported without them in a certain degree; and that the more liberty any nation enjoys, the greater must be their number, and necessity. The most ignorant can perceive the mischiefs that must arise from corrupt Ministers and venal Parliaments, but it requires some sagacity to discern, that assemblies of men unconnected by self-interest will no more draw together in the business of the publick, than horses without harness and bridles; but, like them, instead of being quietly guided in the right road of general utility, will immediately run riot,

148 The NATURE and

stop the wheels of government, and tear all the political machine to pieces.

From hence it comes to pass that all ignorant wrong-headed people naturally run into opposition and faction, whilst the wise man knows that these Evils cannot be eradicated, and that their excess only can be prevented; that thus far every honest man will endeavour to his utmost, but to proceed farther only fools will hope for, or knaves pretend. He knows that numbers of men must always act in the same manner, if in the same circumstances; that Politicks are a Science as reducible to certainty as Mathematicks, and in them effects as invariably follow their causes: that the operations of Will are as uniform, as those of matter and motion; and that, tho' the actions of individuals are contingencies, those of numbers

ORIGIN of EVIL. 149

numbers are constant, and invariable : that, tho' a single man may possibly prefer publick utility to private advantage, it is utterly impossible, that the majority of numerous bodies should be actuated by the same generous, and patriotic principles ; these can spring only from Virtue and Wisdom, benevolent hearts, and comprehensive understandings ; which, being the portion but of a few more exalted individuals, can never be found in the multitude to be govern'd : nor can they be bestow'd in any extraordinary degree on those who govern, who would thereby be render'd unfit for their occupations : Statesmen, and Ministers, who must be hackney'd in the ways of men, cannot be made of such pure and refin'd materials ; peculiar must be the composition of that little creature call'd a *Great Man*. He must be form'd

150 The NATURE and

of all kinds of contradictions: He must be indefatigable in business, to fit him for the labours of his station, and at the same time fond of pleasures, to enable him to attach many to his interests by a participation of their vices: He must be master of much artifice and knavery, his situation requiring him to employ, and be employed by so many knaves; yet he must have some honesty, or those very knaves will be unwilling to trust him: He must be possess'd of great magnanimity perpetually to confront surrounding enemies, and impending dangers; yet of great meanness, to flatter those enemies, and suffer tamely continual injuries, and abuses: He must be wise enough to conduct the great affairs of Mankind with sagacity and success, and to acquire riches, and honours for his reward; and at the same time foolish enough to think it
worth

ORIGIN of EVIL. 151

worth a wise man's while to meddle with such affairs at all, and to accept of such imaginary rewards for real sufferings. Since then in all human Governments such must the Governors, and such the Governed eternally be, it is certain they must be ever big with numberless imperfections, and productive of abundant Evils: and it is no less plain, that if infinite Goodness could not exclude natural and moral Evils, infinite Power can never prevent political.

I hope, Sir, the picture I have here drawn of human nature, and human Government, will not appear to you too much of the Caricature kind: your experience in both must inform you that it is like, tho' your good nature may incline you to be sorry that it is so. I trust likewise to your good sense to dis-

152 The NATURE and

tinguish, that what has here been said of their imperfections, and abuses, is by no means intended as a defence of them, but meant only to shew their necessity: to this every wise man ought quietly to submit, endeavouring at the same time to redress them to the utmost of his power; which can be effected by one method only; that is, by a reformation of Manners: for as all Political Evils derive their Original from Moral, these can never be remov'd, untill those are first amended. He, therefore, who strictly adheres to Virtue and Sobriety in his conduct, and inforces them by his example, does more real service to a State, than he who displaces a Minister, or dethrones a Tyrant; this gives but a temporary relief, but that exterminates the Cause of the disease. No immoral Man then can possibly be a true patriot; and all those
who

ORIGIN of EVIL. 153

who profess outrageous zeal for the liberty and prosperity of their Country, and at the same time infringe her laws, affront her religion, and debauch her people, are but despicable Quacks, by fraud or ignorance increasing the disorders they pretend to remedy: as such, I know, they have always appear'd to your superior judgment, and such they are ever esteem'd by,

S I R, &c.

L E T-

LETTER VI.

ON

RELIGIOUS EVILS.

LETTER VI

Religious Enthusiasm

LETTER VI.

On Religious EVILS.

S I R,

I NOW come to my last head of Evils, which I call Religious ; by which I mean all that madness, and folly, into which mankind have perpetually fallen, under the name of Religion ; together with all those Prosecutions, Massacres, and Martyrdoms, which some have been induced to inflict, and others to suffer, from an Enthusiastic Zeal for those errors and absurdities : Evils of the most enormous size and which of all others are the most difficult to be accounted for, as their existence seems most inconsistent with

158 The N A T U R E and
with infinite Goodness, and most easily
preventable by infinite Power. For, tho'
human nature cou'd not be exempted
from natural and moral Evil (as has been
shewn) even by Omnipotence, yet, one
would think, a far less degree of power
might have been sufficient to have de-
fended it from Religious; by imparting
to Mankind a true, rational, and expli-
cit system of Theology, and Ethicks;
by which means all the absurdities of
false Religions, and all the calamities
flowing from those absurdities, would have
been effectually prevented. Wonderful
therefore must it appear, since the hap-
piness of Men, thro' every Part of their
existence, so much depends on their Re-
ligion, that is, on their entertaining right
notions of God and his Attributes, of
their duty to him, and their behaviour
to each other; most wonderful, I say,
and

ORIGIN of EVIL. 159

and astonishing it must appear, that a wise and benevolent Creator should so far have deserted his Creatures on this important occasion, as to have suffered them thro' all generations to have wandered amidst such perilous precipices in the dark; or if at any time he has vouchsafed them any supernatural light, that it should have been so faint and glimmering that it has rather served to terrify them with the gloomy prospect of their danger than to enable them to avoid it.

If we look back as far as history will carry us, we shall find all ages and nations practising, under the name of Religion, such inhuman, obscene, stupid and execrable Idolatries that it would disgrace human Nature but to enumerate them: we shall see the wisest Men of the wisest Countries consulting Oracles of wood and stone,

160 The NATURE and
stone, and confiding in the foolish super-
stition of the flight of birds, the entrails
of beasts, and the pecking of chickens;
we shall see them butchering their inno-
cent herds and flocks as an atonement for
their vices, and sacrificing their enemies,
their slaves, their children, and some-
times themselves, to appease the wrath
of their imaginary Deities, of whose
worship no cruelty was too horrid to be
made a part; and by whose infamous
examples no wickedness was too execrable
to be patronised. At length Christianity
appeared, a sketch of morality the most
rational, and of Religion the most sub-
lime the World had ever seen; which,
if ever God condescended to reveal his
Will to Man, undoubtedly makes the
fairest pretensions to be that Revelation:
and indeed, if we seriously consider its
internal Excellence, the reasonableness of
its

ORIGIN of EVIL. 161

its Morality, the sublimity of its Theology, that it alone has fixed the right Criterion of Virtue, alone discovered the magnanimity of Forgiveness: that its notions of the Deity, his attributes and dispensations, are so unlike all that ever entered into the heads of the wisest philosophers of preceding ages, and yet so well confirmed by the learned discoveries of all succeeding times; so far exalted above all human Reason, and yet so consonant with it, and what is most conclusive, so infinitely above the Capacities of those who published them to the World; if we add to this its obscure rise and amazing progress, I think, we can scarcely doubt but that there must be something Supernatural in it: and yet, with all these marks of Divinity stamped upon it, far from answering that idea of Perfection which we might expect from

M

the

162 The N A T U R E and

the divine Interposition, it was but a Sketch whose Out-lines indeed appear the Work of a consummate Master, but filled up from time to time by unequal and injudicious hands. It had many defects in its institution, and was attended with many and great Evils in its consequences; in its institution it wanted Universality, Authenticity, Perspicuity and Policy; and in its consequences it was soon corrupted, and from that corruption productive of the most mischievous effects. Its great Author designed it not to be exempted from any of these Imperfections. He revealed it only to a small and obscure corner of the World in Parables and Mysteries: He guarded not its original Purity, which seems to have died with himself, by committing it to any written Records, but left it in the hands of illiterate Men, who, tho' they were honest
enough

ORIGIN of EVIL. 163

enough to dye for it, were never wise enough perfectly to understand it. All Policy he disclaims in exprefs Words, saying, *My Kingdom is not of this World*; that is, I meddle not with the Political Affairs of Mankind; I teach Men to despise the World, but not to govern it. Nor did He expect any better consequences from its progress than those which actually followed: He was by no means ignorant of its future corruption, and that, tho' his primitive institution breathed nothing but Peace, and Forbearance, Good-will and Benevolence; yet that in mixing with the Policies and Interests of Mankind, it would be productive of tyranny and oppression, of martyrdoms and massacres, of national wars and family dissensions. *Think not*, says He, *I come to send Peace on Earth, I come not to send Peace but a Sword: for I am come*

164 The NATURE and

to set a man at Variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. A Prophecy too fatally fulfilled!

From what inscrutable source can all these imperfections, and all these consequent Evils, derive their existence? On what incomprehensible plan must the wise Disposer of all things proceed, to suffer men thus to bewilder themselves in the labyrinths of error, and from thence to plunge into the gulphs of wickedness and misery, when the least direction from his omnipotent hand would lead them thro' the flowery paths of Truth to Virtue and Felicity? Strange! that he has not given them Reason sufficient to perform this important office! Stranger! that, if ever he condescended to assist
that

ORIGIN of EVIL. 165

that Reason with his infinite Wisdom, even the Religion that results from that supernatural assistance should be still deficient in almost every one of the principle requisites necessary towards accomplishing the great and beneficent ends it was designed for ! that it should want Universality to render it impartial, Authenticity to make it demonstrable, Perspicuity to make it intelligible, and Policy to make it useful to Mankind : that it should immediately have been corrupted, and from that corruption being productive of all the Misery and Wickedness it seemed calculated to prevent. But on examination we shall find, that these Evils, like all those of which we have before treated, owe their existence to no defect of goodness or power in God, but to the imperfection of Man and their own necessity : that is, to the impracticability of giving

166 The N A T U R E and

a perfect Religion to an imperfect Creature : from whence this impracticability arises I will endeavour to explain.

There are but two methods, that we know of, by which God can communicate a Religion to Mankind : that is, either by the deductions which he has impowered him to make by the force of that natural reason which he has implanted in him, or by the extraordinary interposition of Divine Revelation : now from the first of these little need be said to shew that nothing perfect can be expected : our Reason is unstable in its foundations, and uncertain in its conclusions ; our lives are extremely short, and our progress in science no less tedious, and retarded by numberless obstacles : much of our time is employed in getting ideas, and much in acquiring language

ORIGIN of EVIL. 167

to express them : few Men have capacities to reason, and fewer leisure : some having sense but no learning, want materials to work with ; others having learning, and no sense, become more absurd by having amassed much matter to mistake about : so that to raise any tolerable system of Religion, or Morals, from human Reason, requires the labours of many generations ; from all which have already past how little truth can we collect ? and yet perhaps much of that little is owing to Revelation, which we are apt to think unnecessary from the very assistance we have received from it ; like the Country-man who despised the Sun because it shined in the day-time. We see but a very small part of the great Whole, and see that small part so superficially, that we comprehend not the essence of any thing ; neither of Body or

M 4
Spirit,

168 The NATURE and

Spirit, of Space or Time, of Infinity or Eternity ; we know scarce any thing of any thing, and least of all of the Nature of God or ourselves ; and therefore it is by no means surprizing that all Religions derived from such a source should be full of Errors and Absurdities. If it be asserted, that God might have given to Man a more comprehensive Reason and a greater Insight into Nature and Futurity : I answer, he certainly might, and he might also have given him the strength of the Horse and the swiftness of the Stag, as well as the understanding of an Angel ; but then he had not continued to be Man ; or if he had, he would have suffered many superior Evils from these unhappy acquisitions.

If we consider the other method, by which God can communicate a Religion
to

ORIGIN of EVIL. 169

to Mankind, we shall find it no less incapable of producing a perfect one; because tho' God is sufficiently able to give a perfect Religion, Man is utterly unable to receive it. God cannot impart knowledge to Creatures, of which he himself has made them incapable by their nature and formation: he cannot instruct a Mole in Astronomy, or an Oyfter in Musick, because he has not given them Members, nor Faculties necessary for the acquisition of those sciences: neither is this any diminution of his Omnipotence, because acting in such a manner would be willing Contrarieties at the same time: it would be opposing his own Designs, making Creatures what they are not, and granting them Powers which he thought proper to deny them: a Revelation therefore from God can never be such as we might expect from
infinite

170 The N A T U R E and
infinite Power, Wisdom and Goodness,
but must condescend to the Ignorance
and Infirmities of Man : was the wisest
Legislator in the World to compose
Laws for a Nursery, they must be Child-
ish Laws : so was God to reveal a Reli-
gion to Mankind, tho' the Revealer was
divine, the Religion must be human, or
it could be of no use to those for whose
sake it was revealed : and therefore,
like them, it must be liable to numberless
Imperfections, amongst which all those
Deficiencies before-mentioned are abso-
lutely unavoidable, and impossible to be
prevented by any power whatever : these
are the Want of Universality, Authenti-
city, Perspicuity and Policy ; its certain
Corruption, with all that inundation of
Wickedness and Misery which must flow
from that Corruption. Great and nu-
merous Evils ! from which it is not dif-
ficult

ORIGIN of EVIL. 171

ficult to shew, that no Revelation communicated to Man can be exempted by an Omnipotent Revealer.

First then it must want Universality : that is, however conducive it may be to the virtue and happiness of Mankind in general, it cannot be alike communicated to all Men in all ages and all nations of the World ; because, from the nature of things, it must have a beginning and a progression : it must at first be revealed at some time and in some place ; and when-ever and where-ever that is, there must have been times and places in which it was not revealed ; and therefore it is impossible it can be Universal ; and this not proceeding from any impotence or partiality in the Revealer, but from the modes of existence of all human affairs.

It

172 The NATURE and

It must likewise want Authenticity: that is, tho' its divine Authority may be more or less credible according to the circumstances of the evidence, yet it can never be capable of a direct or demonstrative proof; because God must communicate this Revelation to Mankind either by a general or a particular Inspiration: that is, either by inspiring all Men, or by inspiring a few to teach it to others: the first of these methods, or a Universal Inspiration, is impossible in Nature, and absurd even in Imagination, and would be the total alteration of human nature: the other must ever be liable to infinite uncertainty, because tho' a Man may possibly know when he himself is inspired, (tho' that, I think, may be very well questioned) yet, that he should ever produce indubitable credentials of a Divine Commission to others,

who

ORIGIN of EVIL. 173

who are uninspired, seems utterly impracticable, there being no marks by which the fact can be ascertained, nor any faculties in the human mind which are able to distinguish it: the excellence of the Revelation he teaches, its beneficent ends, and the miracles he may work in its confirmation, may altogether render it more or less probable, but can never amount to a certain proof, because we know so little of the ends and consequences of things, and so much less of the nature of Miracles: we understand indeed nothing about them, but that we ourselves are unable to perform them; but what Beings of superior Orders may be able to do we cannot tell; nor yet what power, inclination or permission such Beings may have to deceive us. If it is impossible therefore we can be certain of the divine Authority of a Revelation,

174 The NATURE and

tion, even by a personal communication with its first Author, much less can we be assured of it thro' the fallacious mediums of Tradition or History; for whoever observes the propensity Men have to impose upon themselves and others, how difficult it is to come at a true Representation of the commonest fact, even at the distance of a few miles or a few years, will be easily convinced, that all human Tradition can be nothing more than a Complication of designed Fraud and inevitable Error; a Glass which misrepresents all objects by magnifying or diminishing them, just as it is placed by the hand of Knavery for the inspection of Folly and Credulity. History indeed carries with it a greater Authority, but must ever be liable to infinite Imperfections: we can never be certain that the Writers of it, being Men, were not imposed

ORIGIN of EVIL. 175

posed upon themselves, or did not intend to impose on others; and therefore its original evidence cannot be conclusive, and must grow daily weaker in proportion to its antiquity: it must necessarily be subject to all uncertainties proceeding from the variation of languages and customs, ignorant transcribers, false translations, interpolations and forgeries; and as the histories of Religions are more connected with Mens interests than those of other occurrences, so they must be ever more subject to these Frauds and Impositions; for the same reason that a Bank-note is more likely to be counterfeited than a News-paper. It is therefore impossible that History can afford us any certain proof of a supernatural and miraculous dispensation, because a Fact, unlikely to be true, can never be demonstrated by a Relation not impossible to be false.

176 The NATURE and

false. If it be said, that God may inspire the writers of such important Records with Infallibility, I answer, the Proof that he has so inspired them will be attended with no less difficulty than the proof of that divine authority which is to be established by it; and it must ever be absurd to prove the truth of a Revelation by the infallibility of its Records, and the infallibility of its Records from the truth of the Revelation. It is plain therefore, that, tho' infinite Goodness may reveal a Religion to so imperfect a creature as Man, yet infinite Power cannot, by reason of that Imperfection, give to that Revelation such a degree of Authenticity that is such a demonstrable proof of its divine Authority as some Men unreasonably expect, and others as ridiculously bestow upon it.

It

ORIGIN of EVIL. 177

It must want Perspicuity : that is, it must be much more obscure both in its speculative and practical Doctrines, than might be expected from the interposition of infinite wisdom, truth and benevolence. In its speculative Doctrines Obscurity must be unavoidable, because they must treat of subjects above the reach of our Comprehensions : which neither eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor has entered into the heart of Man to conceive ; and therefore no Power can impart to us clear and explicit Ideas of such things without first bestowing on us new faculties and new senses ; that is, without the total alteration of our Natures. But what is most of all extraordinary is, that it must be likewise to a certain degree obscure in its practical and moral precepts ; and this from a reason not the less valid for having never before been insisted on ;

N

which

178 The NATURE and

which is, from the Necessity of Moral Evil: that is, since God, as has been shewn, was obliged by Necessity to admit Moral Evil into the Creation, he must probably be obliged, by the same Necessity, to suffer it in some degree to continue; and therefore cannot enforce the universal practice of Virtue by laws so explicit, by threats and promises so glaring and by commands so incontestably of divine Authority as can admit of no doubt; for these would be so absolutely irresistible as at once to eradicate all human Vice, which has already been proved to have been admitted only from the impossibility of its exclusion without the introduction of greater Evils or the loss of superior Good. — If Omnipotence could not prevent the existence of Moral Evil by the original formation of Man, totally to extirpate it by Revelation would be

ORIGIN of EVIL. 179

be to counteract his own wise, tho' incomprehensible designs ; and therefore a Divine Revelation can never be a regular Body of practical Institutes, clear and perspicuous, free from all doubts and altercations, inforced by perpetual Miracles, by visible and immediate Rewards and Punishments ; but a still Voice whispering gentle Warnings, divine Admonitions and supernatural Truths ; a Light shining in a dark place, illuminating to a certain degree the native Obscurity of the human Mind ; and discovering by faint glimmerings the Designs of Providence, and a distant prospect of a future Life.

It must also want policy : that is, it can never prescribe political rules by which Mankind can be conducted in the Government of Nations, or their pretended

180 The NATURE and

rights of War and Peace, because all these affairs being incapable (as has been shewn) of being carry'd on by any other means than those of violence, fraud, and corruption; a Divine Revelation cannot possibly give any directions about them; because all such must be necessarily inconsistent either with Virtue or with practicability: totally to forbid these methods of governing mankind, who can be govern'd by no other, would be destructive of all Government; to allow them, of all Morality: and therefore it is necessary that men should be left to act in these matters at their peril, as particular circumstances may require, with only a general system of religion and morality for their guide. If a Divine Revelation can give no laws for the management of Civil Government, much less can it institute any new policies peculiar to itself,

ORIGIN of EVIL. 181

self, under the names of Spiritual or Ecclesiastical ; all which, however divine in their Original, must necessarily be administer'd, if administer'd by Man, by the same unjustifiable methods as others, with this additional inconvenience, that they cou'd never be justly resisted. God cannot therefore, I apprehend, delegate Spiritual power to Man, without patronising all that Violence, Corruption, and Iniquity, which must result from it, and without which no power in the hands of Men can be exercised over Men. For the imperfection of Man is incompatible with the purity of a Divine Government. The Government of all creatures must correspond with their natures ; and it seems to me as impossible that Societies of Men should submit under a Divine Government, as that Wolves and Tygers shou'd live together under the regu-

182 The NATURE and

ations of Human Policy: but most of all impossible it must be that a divine and human Government should subsist together in the same Society, for they must immediately clash: and whenever that happens, the least spark of divine authority, if really divine, must infallibly consume all human power, and destroy all Civil Government whatever,

Lastly, it must very soon be corrupted, and from that corruption be productive of the most mischievous effects: for, as the purest stream pour'd into an impure vessel must partake of its impurity; so must the most perfect Religion, that can be reveal'd by God to so imperfect a creature as Man, partake of his imperfection, and produce many and great Evils both natural and moral; that is, much of that misery, and wickedness, which

ORIGIN of EVIL. 183

which it was intended to prevent: this no wisdom can obviate, no power put a stop to, so long as that imperfection remains; but it must constantly come to pass from a train of unavoidable consequences, which must invariably follow their causes, so long as human nature continues what it is.

For instance, when a Divine Revelation is first communicated to Mankind, it must be receiv'd (if receiv'd at all) because its precepts are approv'd, and its authority believ'd; and all those nations, who thus approve the one, and believe the other, must esteem it both their interest and their duty to encourage and support it. This they can effect by no other means than by granting peculiar privileges to all who profess it, by forming from it their national Religion, and

184 The NATURE and

publick worship, and by maintaining an Order of Men to preach that Religion, and minister that worship, to the people; all which amounts to a National Establishment. Now the moment any Religion becomes national, or established, its purity must certainly be lost, because it is then impossible to keep it unconnected with mens interests; and if connected, it must inevitably be perverted by them. Whenever temporal advantages are annex'd to any religious profession, they will be sure to call in all those who have no religion at all: knaves will embrace it for the sake of interest, fools will follow them for the sake of fashion; and when once it is in such hands, Omnipotence itself can never preserve its purity. That very Order of Men, who are maintain'd to support its interests, will sacrifice them to their own; and
being

ORIGIN of EVIL. 185

being in the sole possession of all its promises, and all its terrors, and having the tenderness of Childhood, the weakness of Age, and the ignorance of the vulgar to work upon; I say, these Men, vested with all these powers, yet being but Men, will not fail to convert all the mighty influence they must derive from them to the selfish ends of their own avarice or ambition, and consequently to the total destruction of its Original Purity: from it they will lay claim to powers which it never design'd them, and to possessions, to which they have no right; to make good these false pretensions, false histories will be forg'd, and fabulous traditions invented; groundless terrors will be flung out to operate on superstition and timidity; Creeds and Articles will be contriv'd to confound all Reason, and Tests impos'd to sift out all who have honesty or

186 The NATURE and

courage enough to resist these unwarrantable encroachments. Devotion will be turn'd into farce and pageantry, to captivate mens eyes, that their pockets may with more facility be invaded: they will convert Piety into Superstition, Zeal into Rancour, and this Religion, notwithstanding all its Divinity, into diabolical malevolence. By degrees knaves will join them, fools believe them, and cowards be afraid of them; and having gained so considerable a part of the World to their interests, they will erect an independent dominion among themselves dangerous to the liberties of Mankind, and representing all those who oppose their tyranny as God's enemies, teach it to be meritorious in his sight to persecute them in this world and damn them in another. Hence must arise Hierarchies, Inquisitions, and Popery; for Popery is but the
con-

ORIGIN of EVIL. 187

consummation of that tyranny which every religious System in the hands of Men is in perpetual pursuit of, and whose principles they are all ready to adopt whenever they are fortunate enough to meet with it's success.

This Tyranny cannot subsist without fierce and formidable Opposition, from whence innumerable Sects, Schisms and Dissentions will lift up their contentious heads, each gaping for that very power which they are fighting to destroy, tho' unable either to acquire or retain it; and introductive only of their constant concomitants, Ignorance, Self-conceit, Ill-breeding, Obstinacy, Anarchy, and Confusion. From these contests all kinds of Evils must derive their existence, blood-shed and desolation, persecutions, massacres and martyrdoms.

All

188 The NATURE and

All these Evils you see are but the necessary Consequences of the national Establishment of any Religion which God can communicate to Man, in whose hands its Divinity can never long preserve its purity or keep it unmixed with his imperfections, his folly and wickedness. Nay, so far is the Divinity of a Revelation from being able to prevent its corruption, that it will but increase and hasten it; for the greater share of Divinity it partakes, the greater must be its Excellence; the greater its Excellence, the more universal must be its Approbation; the more it is approved, the more it must be encouraged; the more it is encouraged, the sooner it will be established; and the sooner it is established, the sooner it must be corrupted and made subservient to the worst purposes of the worst of Men: yet it is plain this Establishment

ORIGIN of EVIL. 189

lishment is no more than the consequence of its excellence, and Men's approbation; no more than the alternative of its total extinction, and without which it cannot be preserved at all; and therefore the corruption of every divine Revelation communicated to Man, is, by the nature of Man, clearly unavoidable.

From what has been here said it appears plainly, that all the numerous Evils which adhere to, and all the mischievous effects, which follow all human Religions, whether natural or revealed, by no means owe their existence to any want of power, wisdom or goodness in God, but, like all others, to the imperfection of Man; that is, to his folly and wickedness, which must inevitably corrupt them. It is also, I think, no less evident that all arguments levelled against
the

190 The N A T U R E and

the divine Original of Christianity, founded on its imperfections and pernicious consequences, (which are all, I think, that have any weight) may be proved to be vain and inconclusive; and this not by concealing or denying those imperfections and pernicious consequences, as many have absurdly attempted, but by fairly shewing, that they all proceed from the imperfections of those Creatures to whom it is revealed; and that, so long as those continue, these cannot be prevented by any wisdom, goodness or power whatever.

Thus, Sir, if I mistake not, I have sufficiently, tho' concisely, answered that most abstruse and important Question, *Whence came Evil?* and proved, that all the Evils we feel, and all which we see around us, derogate not in the least from the wisdom, power, or goodness of our
Creator;

ORIGIN of EVIL. 191

Creator ; but proceed intirely from that subordination which is so necessary to the happiness, and even to the existence of the great and incomprehensible Whole. I have shewn that all subordination must imply imperfection in some Beings or other ; and that all imperfection must consist in the absence of comparative Good, or the admission of positive Evil. I have shewn that most of the Evils we usually complain of are of the first kind ; the want only of those perfections we see others enjoy, or imagine infinite power might have bestowed upon ourselves ; which are therefore in fact no Evils at all : that those of the latter sort, or positive Evils, are such as from the nature of things must intrude themselves into all Creation, and therefore that Omnipotence can do no more than make choice of that System which admits the fewest ; being obliged,
by

192 The NATURE and

by the imperfection of all created Beings, the untractableness of Matter, and some incomprehensible connection between Good and Evil, Happiness and Misery, to admit both, or to give existence to neither. I have likewise shewn that Moral Evil may have its necessity and utility too as well as Natural; at least, that if Natural Evils are necessary, Moral ones are expedient, to prevent that necessary Misery from falling to the share of perfect Innocence, and to convert unavoidable sufferings into just punishments; that tho' the essence of all Moral Evil consists in the production of Natural, yet it may have some collateral tendency to Good; and that the Wicked, whilst they are justly punished for the miseries which they occasion, may probably, by that very guilt and punishment, some way remotely contribute to universal happiness.

ORIGIN of EVIL. 193

piness. I have shewn that if Natural and Moral Evils could not be prevented, the existence of Political and Religious Evils must on course be unavoidable, they being but the certain consequences of the other: that all human Government must be in the highest degree imperfect, and big with all manner of Evils, being the dominion of ignorant and wicked creatures over each other; that, as such creatures can be governed only by fear of punishment or hopes of reward, all Government amongst them must be founded on Violence and Corruption, and ever supported and administered by the same vitious and unjustifiable methods: that no power whatever can give a perfect Religion to so imperfect a creature as Man, either by Nature or Revelation; not by nature, because, whilst that is human nature, he can ne-

194 The NATURE and

ver discover by Reason the Truths on which a Perfect system of Theology or Ethicks can be erected; not by Revelation, because he wants faculties to comprehend such supernatural discoveries, altho' they should be imparted to him; that, was he capable of once receiving a perfect Religion, it is not possible he could long retain it; because, if it could be kept intirely separate from his worldly interests, it would soon be neglected and perish in oblivion; and, if it was not, such a connection would quickly corrupt its purity and destroy its essence, so that national establishments would be necessary for its support, and yet infallibly productive of its destruction. That all these Evils proceed not from wrong dispositions or accidental causes, but singly and solely from the imperfection of Man; and yet, that in the gradation
from

ORIGIN of EVIL. 195

from infinite perfection to absolute nothing, there must be one rank occupied by such a Creature as Man with all his imperfections about him; that these imperfections must be annexed to his situation, and adhere to every thing that relates to him, to his happiness, to his morals, to his government, and to his religion: that, in like manner, all other created Beings must have Evils and Imperfections peculiar to their stations and proportioned to their inferiority; notwithstanding all which, there is as much Good, and as little Evil, in the universal system as the nature of Creation will admit of; and that therefore it is a Work equal to what we might expect from the Operations of infinite Benevolence joined with infinite Power.

F I N I S.

